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THE

MOOSE-HUNTER;

OR,

LIFE IN THE MAINE WOODS.

BY JOHN NEAL.

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THE MOOSE-HUNTER.

CHAPTER I.

SOMEWHAT OF A MYSTERY.

THE terrible superstitions that used to prevail throughout New England, before the Revolutionary war, have not wholly died out in some parts of the country. They are still to be found lurking in the hearts of the people along the borders, notwithstanding the progress of education.

By the almanac, it was near the first month of spring; but by the snow upon the mountains, the ice upon the rivers and lakes, and the horror of great darkness that overhung the land for days together, blocking up the highways with impassable drifts, and roaring through the great wilderness with a noise like that of the sea, it was not only mid-winter, but the gloomiest of mid-winters in the District of Maine.

Instead of maple-sugar, foxberry-leaves and May-flowers, the trailing arbutus, which blooms underneath the snow long before the month of May; children were out after frost-fish and partridges, and spent most of their time out of school-hours in sliding down hill, snow-balling, building ice-lodges, or sleighing, with the wind always in their teeth if they went fast, no matter which way it blew, till it took away their breath and obliged them to pull up, with their famous trotters.

A quilting was under way, and preparations were in progress for a marriage, notwithstanding the severe weather, but the skies were now overcast, and a storm was brewing which threatened to put a stop to all the arrangements. Nevertheless, the preparations were continued; for it was generally understood that, if the highways for twenty miles around were not blocked up, and the narrow, crooked paths of the roaring woods were not buried out of sight, there would be such a gathering at Uncle Jerry Hooper's, just over the Ridge, as had not been heard of since the new meeting-house went up, when the "neighbors," even from the borders of New Hampshire and Vermont, flocked to the raising.

Large as the old unshapely mansion was, with all its additions and after-thoughts—with all the sloping sheds and carriage-houses, running away off into pig-sties and other

outlying appendages, it was never too large for a husking, or a love-feast, or a militia-training, nor was there any want of company for Uncle Jerry. The "Brigadier" was what they called a "four-handed man," of large size and prodigious bodily strength, like some of the *quadrumana* we hear of in Central Africa. With his two hands he could do the work of four, notwithstanding his great age, whether at mowing or lumbering, wood-chopping or teaming. Uncle Jerry's neighbors, for a distance of thirty, forty, and fifty miles, were in the habit of dropping in upon him at all hours, night and day, "putting up" their teams and their wives and daughters, without so much as saying "by your leave." If the Brigadier happened to be full, they would borrow a horse blanket and take a snooze upon the hay-mow, or stretch themselves out before the kitchen-fire. Oftentimes, people he had never before seen, and might never see again, would make their appearance at the breakfast-table, at peep of day, as if they had a perfect right there—which, indeed, most of them had, for the kind-hearted old man was a Methodist now, though born a Quaker, and a magistrate withal, and his doors were always open; and nobody, not even the outcast and wanderer, was sent away empty.

Not a few would come and go, not only without declaring their business, but without even showing their faces to the family, or leaving their names. Among these, were "Friends" on their way to "yearly meeting," or to market; Methodist preachers on a tramp; strangers, who had "hearn tell o' the Squire," and wanted to see for themselves, if what they heard of the giant was true.

Uncle Jeremiah was born a Quaker, it was said, somewhere about "Porchmouth," New Hampshire; but, having married for his first wife a beautiful young Methodist, and gone into the militia business to gratify her, they were obliged to "deal with him," and then to "turn him out of meeting," as they called it, head first! Whereupon, without opening his mouth in remonstrance or complaint, the Brigadier took his dear little wife under his arm, and left that part of the country forever—disappearing as suddenly and mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up, like the sons of Eliab and Korah; such, at least, was the tradition among the "Friends."

After that whole generation had nearly passed away, and nothing had been heard of him, it began to be whispered about, and at last believed, that Jerry had been met with somewhere "down East," in possession of one of the largest and best-managed farms in the whole District of Maine; and after a while rumor had it that he was located near Frenchman's Bay, and had married a second or third wife, much younger than himself.

These were followed by other flying reports and strange intimations. There was believed to be a great mystery about his life, so that a certain class were shy of him, without well knowing why. These persons would, oftentimes, lower their voices to a whisper, and look about uneasily, when they talked of his great bodily strength, of his large teeth and uncommonly bright eyes—likening him to the great Jewish Lawgiver, of whom it is declared that, when he was called away, at the age of one hundred and twenty, "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated;" yet they were neither Quakers nor Methodists, but people who were ready to believe any thing, and loved to shake their heads, and talk about covenants and leagues, and Methusela, and Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew. Notwithstanding the giant's great openness and imperturbable good-nature, these suspicious busy-bodies were satisfied that he knew more than he chose to acknowledge about every thing that had happened for the last hundred years or so; and yet, they were afraid to interrogate him very closely, for he always managed to baffle their shrewdest guesses, and usually ended with laughing at them, till they looked a little ashamed. It was, nevertheless, their belief that he had served in the Revolutionary war, if not at the siege of Louisburg—that he saw the death of Montgomery, if not of Wolfe—that he was well acquainted with Aaron Burr's father, and piloted the son through the great Northern Wilderness, by way of the Kennebec, when he marched to the help of Montgomery—that he had been to school with Benedict Arnold, and knew more of Captain Kidd's treasures than it would be possible for anybody to know from hearsay or at second hand. All very strange, to be sure—very—for the old man never had said a syllable to justify their belief. All he had ever done was, when adroitly questioned, merely to let such inquisitive people draw their own conclusions. The strange stories they told, therefore, were of their own invention.

Once the minister thought the Brigadier had betrayed himself. They were talking about Ethan Allen, and the capture of Ticonderoga. The old man's eyes kindled, and he spoke as if he had been personally present with the Green Mountain Boys, or stood at the very elbow of the terrible Vermonter, when he thundered out his reply to the British Commander: "In the name of God Almighty and the Continental Congress!" "There," said the minister, "*there*, the old man was so carried away by his feelings, that he forgot himself, I think; but it never happened again, to my knowledge."

That he was well off, and that he had got possession of the farm, with a township of timberlands, for a song, under some mysterious conditions, everybody knew; they lowered their voices, and shrugged their shoulders, whenever the subject

was mentioned. Still, no two persons ever agreed as to the nature of those conditions, though all kept on the track of the mystery with the dogged perseverance of a sleuth-hound, year after year.

On the whole, therefore, Uncle Jerry was rather a troublesome neighbor; and yet, as he always said what he meant, and meant what he said, people had faith in him. Then, too, as he never bothered strangers about their business, or their opinions, political or religious, nor ever allowed other people to bother him—if he could help it—he came to be popular even with the Friends, who, despite his marriage and apostasy, consented to overlook his military title, and “*put up*” with him; calling him “*Jeremiah*,” and treating him as if he were still a member of the Society. And so it came to pass that Uncle Jerry had all the inconvenience of tavern-keeping, without enjoying a landlord’s advantages, year in and year out. But, being full of Christian courtesy and the spirit of accommodation, and a little too ready, perhaps, to be all things to all men—so long as they behaved themselves, and were not too inquisitive—he used to wear his hat in the house, and talk *thee* and *thou* with the Quakers, and sometimes at his wife. Still, he was not very unreasonable. Upon all proper occasions he would use the language of the world’s people, and sometimes with a flavor and emphasis which certainly had a relish of the camp.

And now, suppose we draw up the curtain.

The family are just through with an early supper, all but Uncle Jerry, who sits in a large leather-bottomed chair, with a bowl of toasted brown bread and milk on the table before him, a mug of cider is simmering on the hearth, and a plate of roasted apples within reach. At his elbow is a large checker-board, with the men set, as if he proposed to keep the field against all comers.

And well he might; for they do say that no man about was ever a match for the Squire, when his “*dander* was up.”

By the wide, flaring chimney-corner, with its wooden settle, and blocks for the children to sit on, and the family dye-pot, with all its unbearable suggestions in full view, sits a tall young man, with a pale, serious face, long hair, and a single-breasted coat, like a Methodist preacher, so absorbed with a slate and large book that he seems to hear nothing of the conversation about him. A little further off is a young woman with very black, abundant hair, flashing eyes, and a strange, uneasy, sad expression about her mouth, which haunts you after you are in bed, and may hinder you from sleeping. Her foot is on the treddle of a flax-wheel, while she is trying to fasten a wisp of flax to the distaff. Just beyond her sits aunt Sarah Hooper, of grandmother, as she is called, with a large wooden tray of apples before her, which she is quartering and peeling for

"apple dowdies." The floor has been freshly sanded and carefully "stroked" with a new hemlock-broom of great width, kept for that special purpose; and the path it has left behind is like the rippling undulations on the sea-shore, when the tide withdraws, inch by inch. This was the newest pattern; and had quite superseded the herring-bone, among the *genteel* families of that neighborhood.

Two or three armfuls of splintered pitch-knots are piled upon the green wood, all incrustated with snow and ice; for the storm rages and roars, and the fine, sharp snow drives against the windows like hail, or bird-shot. The very house itself rocks to its foundations with the changing blast. Still there is so much of warmth and cheerful brightness in that crowded kitchen, as to make it a home—a place of household worship.

In the midst of a stillness which had continued for a long while, there was a sudden outcry in the porch, followed by a disturbance in the front entry, which made Uncle Jerry wriggle in his chair, and cry out, as the crutch that lay over his knees rolled off upon the floor:

"High, there, *high!* What's to pay now? I thought them children was in bed half an hour ago!"

"Better see for yourself, husband; they don't mind me," said aunt Sarah, giving a twirl to the distaff with one hand, while she adjusted her spectacles with the other; "noisy little torments!"

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the black-haired girl. "*Did* you ever!"

There was a hurried pattering of unshod feet, as a large lump of snow, hastily squeezed into shape, found its way through the half-opened door. It flew past grandmother's spectacles, just grazing the cheek of the young woman, who was in the act of reaching forward to arrange a festoon of dried apples over the hanging shelf, and, splashing against the further jamb, fell in a spattering shower upon a slate all covered with figures, over which the young man with a serious face had been laboring a whole hour, by the troublesome, shifting, uncertain light of a pitch-wood fire which went roaring up the chimney with a noise that shook the whole house from garret to cellar, when the rumbling was heaviest. A sudden start and a swarthy flush followed, as the slate, with its carefully-tinned corners, fell from his knees upon the hearth, and the book tumbled out of his lap into the glowing ashes. Then followed a quiet smile, without a word of complaint or a gesture of impatience, though the old slate was terribly shattered, while the young woman sprang to her feet with a faint cry. The frame was dislocated, and two or three fragments of scorched leaves fluttered from the book as he snatched it up. The swarthy glow passed away from the high, clear forehead of the young man, very much as if it were only another flashing up of the turbulent pitch-knot fire, shining through and through him.

"There, now! See what you've done, you little plague, you!" said aunt Sarah. "Dear suz! dear suz! You've spattered the snow all over Master Burleigh's figgerin', and sp'ilt the slate forever!"

The young man looked up, without changing countenance, or paying much attention to the bustle about him, though his large, handsome eyes were fixed upon the young woman with a look of uneasiness—almost of anxiety; but she answered the look with a smile, and glanced at the half-open door, as if expecting somebody to enter.

"Never mind, aunt Sarah," said he, in a low, gentle voice, throwing back his rich brown hair with a shake of his head; "the poor slate had seen its best days long before it came into my possession."

"Used to belong to thy father—hey?" said Uncle Jeremiah.

"Yes; and—and—" faltering and turning away his head from the light—"so did old Pike."

The Squire nodded; and aunt Sarah said:

"But 'old Pike' has gone out o' fashion, Master Burleigh," taking off her spectacles and wiping them with a snuffy bandana.

"Very true," said the schoolmaster, moved by the piteous tones of the good aunt Sarah; "but I valued it because it belonged to father"—speaking hurriedly and rather indistinctly. The young woman stopped her wheel, and leaning forward, touched his arm. A sad smile was the only answer.

"And well he might, Iry Burleigh," added the Brigadier, "for thy father was the beatemest man at figgers, and checkers, and surveyin' in all these parts. I never see'd his match."

"And his hand-writin' was like copy-plate," added aunt Sarah, "and Iry is the very image of his father, as I remember him, at the desk, with his long, beautiful, soft hair, and great, solemn eyes, and that serious way he always had with him."

The schoolmaster, who had been trying to put the pieces of slate together, looked up with a patient smile, as he laid them away carefully, almost reverently, upon the light stand.

Another outburst from the front entry and half-way up-stairs, with much hurrying and scampering, put a stop to the conversation. Other noises also were heard in the chambers overhead; then they seemed away up in the garret; then, so far as they could judge, the noises came from the cellar.

The Brigadier interchanged a look with his wife, and the schoolmaster with the young woman, but nobody moved.

"Why don't thee go and see what's the matter, wife?" said the Brigadier.

"And why don't you? They're not my children, and they plague my life out. I declare I don't know, sometimes, whether I'm on my head or my heels."

"Time thee did, wife."

"No kind o' sprawl in me, sence we've had t' put off the quiltin'."

"Pooh, pooh!" said the Brigadier, and then there was a low, fat chuckle, and a wheeze from the leather-bottomed chair. A giggle followed from the other side of the fire-place—a giggle, rather—as if "bottled velvet" were escaping; and straightway the old man began to get ready for bed, loosening his waist-bands, letting out a large roll of cotton and linen sheeting, "white as the driven snow," and unfastening the knee-buckles. Then he threw himself back in his chair, and rolled about heavily, with his clear blue eyes fixed upon the young woman, as if there were some sort of understanding between them. She colored slightly, and looked over the top of her wheel at Barleigh. When she caught his eye, she turned hastily aside with a slight appearance of trepidation, as if not entirely satisfied with herself.

"There, now! There they go agin!" said aunt Sarah. "I do wish somebody'd go and see what they're a doin' of! Lucy, child, won't you?— afore they turn the house inside out."

Lucy jumped—nearly oversetting a heavy chair, and hurried to the front entry, followed by the Brigadier, with both hands on his hips, on account of the rheumatiz, he pretended, though his wife didn't think so, and there was a roguish twinkle in his eye, which set Lucy giggling afresh.

It was clear, from the puckering of his mouth, and the working of his fat, double-chin, that, on the whole, Uncle Jerry rather liked the hubbub, or "towsy;" and, though unwilling to "own up" just then, while grandmother was in such an "awful pucker," he was not sorry to find so much of what he used to call "clear grit" in the youngsters. If left to himself, he would rather encourage their pranks, though it must be acknowledged they were sometimes very troublesome and noisy. But after it was all over, he would make his acknowledgments, and "own up," just to pacify grandmother, and make it all smooth for the children. Then he would shake his sides, and laugh to himself as he sat in the old creaking leather-bottomed chair, till the crutches would roll out of his lap. At this, Watch, the old house-dog, would withdraw his nose from the ashes, and look up into his master's face, with an expression of astonishment, and sometimes of serious reproof.

But Lucy and the Brigadier were both too late. By the time they reached the front entry the children were all tumbling up stairs together in a heap, screaming and laughing, with their hands full of light, dry snow, which having drifted under the front door, they had snatched up in a hurry, as they heard aunt Loo-loo coming.

Two or three large drifts were in the passage-way, and another on the stairs. It was evident enough that the little

wretches had been jumping over them, and running about, some of them barefooted, and some in their stocking-feet; and that they had carried off up-stairs a further supply in their night-gowns and shirt-flaps. But what was to be done? Baskets of snow were lying about in the corners, as well as all the way up stairs; and though much of it might have been whirled there by the mysterious power of the wind before the outer door was shut, still it was clear that large quantities had been lodged there by snowballing, or dropped from their night-gowns, on their way up to bed.

"Hoity toity!" screamed aunt Sarah, when she saw what the little mischiefs had been doing; "I can't have such carryings on, and I won't! Them children shan't stay to the weddin'! I'll send 'em all off to-morrow!"

"Thee wouldn't, though, would thee, mother?"

"Wouldn't I, though?—you'll see, to-morrow, Brigadier Hooper!"

But the Brigadier knew better; for, though grandmother was a bit of a shrew, and rather sharp-set, like a Lew cross-cut saw, when hurried about her housekeeping, she was a good-natured, kind-hearted, "willin' critter," when allowed to have her own way.

"There, now! There they go, agin!" said grandmother, soon after they had all gone back to the kitchen, and were seated at their work. "Run up, Lucy, dear, will you, and see what they're doin', and tuck 'em all up warm, and tell 'em to be good babies and not disturb poor old grandfather!"

Away went Lucy up-stairs, trailing a ball of blue yarn after her, which the kitten followed at full spring, without much regard to the scornful expression of Watson's countenance; for he had long outlived all such nonsense, and took more pleasure in toasting his cold nose before a slow fire, with his two fore-paws underneath his ponderous jaw, than in any of the pranks which seemed such capital fun for the kitten.

When Lucy reached the garret where the boys had stowed themselves away—"heads and points"—some with their feet upon the bolster, and others cross-piled, just ready to tumble out upon the floor, all pretending to be sound asleep, or snoring, and others in the large beds, breathing hard, as if they had just been hunted for their lives, she found the youngest of the whole sitting up in a yellow flannel night-gown, with his little red heels on the pillow, mauling a ball of snow, and endeavoring to squeeze into shape a considerable quantity of what seemed to be powdered wax, or, so glittering and so unmanageable under his impatient manipulation.

But the girls, who had found their way into the two best beds of the two best bed chambers, without leave, were all up to the elbows in preparations for the wedding. They had laid out upon the bed-quilts, and upon a chest of drawers, what they

tried to persuade themselves, and even aunt Loo-loo, were mince-pies and cakes and doughnuts, with ever so many fat turnover make-believes—all frosted for the occasion, with the snow they had lugged up in their night-gowns and aprons.

Little did they hear of the great, noisy, blustering wind, which threatened to blow off the top of the house, and rip off the shingles; and as little did they care. Though the great elms were groaning aloud, away up in the air; though the snow was tumbling down by cartloads, blocking up all the highways, and piling up drifts—away up—up—to the very wood-house eaves, the youngsters were so busy with their preparations, that they heard nothing but the occasional shutting of a door below, or a rump's from the garret where the boys were stowed away in bulk. Enough for them, the little wretches, that they were all safe at grandfather's—that a quilting was close at hand—a wedding not far off, and no likelihood of their being sent home, for ever so long! What fun they would have, to be sure! playing cousin Luther Hooper and aunty Loo-loo, and old Watch—dear old Watch—and all the rest of the family! Then, too, wouldn't they have *such* a good time with the new calves, and the young lambs—with the great winter-apples, the walnuts, the mince-pies, the maple-sugar, the custards, the parched-corn, and all sorts of goodies—"Oh, my!" And wouldn't they tumble about in the deep snow, head over-heels? Who's afraid? And wouldn't they go poking round after pullet's eggs, and have such glorious times rolling off the hay-mow, down upon the barn floor; and then, after the storm was all over, wouldn't they have such races on the hand-sled, over the hard, glittering crust, from far away up on that hill you see yonder—away—away—down to the river-side, over stumps and fences, and piles of brushwood and blackberry-bushes, and never stopping to breathe, till they went over the large drift on the bank, pump on the hard, smooth ice of the river, and shot across like an arrow! Hadn't they tried it before! and didn't they know!

"Children! children!"

"Oh, my! if there ain't gran'mother!" screamed the largest of the romps, and into bed she "scrabbled," as if the dogs were after her, followed by two or three others, like a litter of pigs.

"Into bed with you, this minute, all of you!" said aunt Lucy, tearing away the coverlet, and shaking off all their snowy make-believes upon the floor.

"There, now! see what she's done!" said the first, trying to pull the bed clothes over her head. "I declare, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, cousin Loo! There goes all our mince-pies and frosted cake, and turnovers; and you've jest spilt our whole bakin'—you have, so!"

"Not another word, Jerasha Jane Pope," said cousin Loo,

hardly able to keep her countenance, when she saw this great girl take the matter so seriously. "If I hear any thing more of this, I'll send grandmother to you—ah, there's grandfather! he's ben listenin' below: and you'd better be still, about the quickest."

There was a sharp whistle at the foot of the stairway, and then, the heavy tread of grandfather in full retreat, as if trying to steal away. Then followed whispering, and a hearty chuckle, with not a little questioning. Cousin Loo, too, disappeared, with her face all in a glow, to report progress and ask leave to sit again--over a basketful of dried apples she was stringing for market.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT WAS IT?

HARDLY had Uncle Jerry got back to his comfortable chair, put aside his crutches, taken off his Quaker hat, and begun to comb out his long white hair, which he wore tied with a black ribbon, after a military fashion of other days, when they were startled by the sound of a clock in the best room, a large, heavy, eight-day clock, which had been silent for a twelve-month, striking *one! two! three!* then, after a loud wheeze, *one! two! three!* more—and, after another short pause, *one!* with such a clamorous, jarring peal that everybody looked up with amazement, waiting and listening till it was all over, with eyes fixed upon the door which opened into the front entry.

"Only seven!" said Uncle Jeremiah, lagging out a bull's eye of the antediluvian type. "Why, I thought that old clock had given up the ghost ever so long ago."

"And so did I," said his wife. "I haven't heerd it strike sence the day we buried the minister's wife from that very room; have you, Lucy?"

"No, aunt Sarah; and I don't believe it has been wound up from that day to this."

"Wal, now," continued Uncle Jeremiah, "I trust say it seems a little strange. Didn't Mrs. Moody die just about even, wife?"

"To be sure, she did! While the clock was strikin'."

"And what do you say to that, Master Bauligh?"

"I say it is rather a singular coincidence."

"But how do you account for the clock strikin' at all, after so long a silence, hey?"

"Oh, the children have been meddling with it, I dare say."

"And I shouldn't much wonder if that Jerashy Jane Pope

had a finger in the pie," added aunt Sarah. "She's always in some sort o' mischief."

"Yes; but how could she manage to make it strike just seven, and no more?" whispered Lucy.

"Oh, that would be easy enough," answered the schoolmaster. "She might set the clock agoing, and then set the hands for seven."

"Dear me, dear me!" said Uncle Jeremiah, "I've got so wide awake now, that I shouldn't go to sleep if I went to bed."

"That's a fact, fither," said his wife. "You'd jess keep a tremblin' and tossin' all night long; and the storm itself's enough to keep us all awake."

"But what am I to do? If neighbor Smith or neighbor Hanson was a leetle nigher, we might have a game o' checkers—*heh-lo!*" and away went one of his crutches. The dog looked up, growled, and then wagged his tail, and struck the floor three times—just three—with great emphasis, very much as if he had taken his cue from the clock; "what a pity thee never learned to play, Iry, when thy father was such a capital hand."

The schoolmaster smiled.

"Maybe thee could play a little, if I was to give thee a man or two—*hey?*"

"No, I thank you. I never take odds; if I play at all, I must play even."

"*Oh, lo!*" said the Brigadier. "Oh, *lo!* I understand thee now; thee dooze play sometimes, *hey?*" drawing the board nearer, and replacing the men; and going to work with a smile not to be misunderstood. Master Burleigh, with uncommon seriousness, accepted the banter. They opened alike; but, after interchanging several men, the Brigadier, who had moved without hesitation at first, began to fight shy, while his antagonist, who had opened with great caution, till he had got possession of the middle of the board, took the offensive, played instantaneously, and gave the Brigadier no time to breathe. Meanwhile, aunt Sarah and Lucy had begun a low, whispering conversation, which grew more and more earnest as the game of checkers went on, and the storm raged more and more furiously.

At last, the Brigadier began to show signs of uneasiness, to fidget in his chair, to rub his chin, to breathe hard, to shift his legs about, and to show that he was not very well satisfied with himself. While his imperturbable adversary was waiting for him to move, he rested the tip of his forefinger on a man, afraid to let go yet not well knowing what to do with it. After two or three changes of purpose, he suddenly withdrew his finger, straightened up, and gave the wooden scittle a push. Then he seemed to breathe more freely.

"You are to jump, sir," said the schoolmaster.

"Jump! where?—oh, I see; but, must I jump?"

"Certainly; they never huff, now."

And so the Brigadier jumped; but with such an air of triumphant self-complacency, as if it were a part of his plan—a trap of his own baiting—that his wife, who played a very pretty game herself, it was said, though she always refused to play after marriage—would have been misled by it, if, on looking up, she had not seen something about her husband's mouth, a shadow, only, which satisfied her that he had a misgiving at least, if no serious apprehension, for the issue.

From that moment the game was up, and Uncle Jerry had nothing for it but to flounder through as best he might, until the schoolmaster, without hurry or nervousness, finished the business by giving away two men, and penning no less than five with the three he had left.

Aunt Sarah looked up at her husband in amazement.

"Where did thee learn that, Iry?" said the Brigadier, twitching at his heavy steel watch-chain, and shifting his position, so that his wife could not see his face. "Handsomest thing I ever see in my life."

"I learned it of my father, sir."

"I thought so! If I didn't may I be—Largel! But if thee understands the game so well, why the plague don't thee play sometimes?"

"I'm afraid to play, sir—afraid to trust myself. It takes too much time, and interferences too much with my studies."

"Wal, Iry, I must acknowledge thee's kept the secret well. What say to another try?"

"With pleasure, if you say so."

At it they went again. Not a word was spoken till the Brigadier looked up suddenly, and said: "Wife! where the plague is Luther? I haven't seen him to-day."

His wife knew by the very tone of his voice how the game was going. She answered soothingly: "He's gone arter the cattle, father."

"Arter the cattle! at this time o' night? and in such a dreadful storm? It's thy move, Iry."

"No, sir—I've just moved," touching the man as he spoke.

"What time did he go, mother?"

"Just afore daybreak," whispered Lucy, leaning over the table and making signs to Uncle Jeremiah, with her eyes fixed on Barleigh, who sat with his hands over his face, and both elbows resting on the back of a chair, waiting for the old man to move.

"Yes, father, ben away ever sence daybreak, and before," added his wife.

"Better tell him, aunt Sarah."

The Brigadier turned to his wife with a look of trouble and

perplexity, forgetting to move, and holding up one of the checker men between his forefinger and thumb. "Haven't taken my finger off, Iry," said he.

The schoolmaster nodded.

"Wal, the cows got loose in the night, somehow," continued aunt Sarah.

"Got loose in the night, wife? Why, who tied them up? Where's Pal'tiah?"

No answer.

"Allers out o' the way when he's wanted. Go on, Iry, will ye?"

"They found their way into the cow-yard, followed by the steers," added Lucy "and broke through the fences, and went tearing off into the woods."

"Frightened, perhaps?"

"So cousin Luther said," added Lucy.

"Bears, maybe?" suggested aunt Sarah.

"Nonsense, mother; bears don't go prowlin' about in winter. Maybe wolves, though; this happens to be jest the weather for the great white Canada wolf."

"Cousin Luther heard the pigs squeal, and the old sow scream," said Lucy. "Then such a to-do in the milkin' yard! So up he jumped, right out o' bed, and went down to see what the matter was; but when he got there, the cows were all gone, the steers, and every thing but the old sow and the pigs, and the oxen, and black Prince and the gray mare."

"And what did he think it was that frightened 'em? Might a' told by the tracks."

"The tracks were all covered up with the light snow blowing about; and the cattle had so trampled the cow-yard that he couldn't find any thing to explain the mystery."

Uncle Jerry grew thoughtful, and seemed troubled; and, soon after, having made a false move, he pushed away the board with more of impatience, or peevishness, than he had ever shown before to a comparative stranger.

They all looked up in surprise, and sat watching him, while he seemed lost in a reverie; now playing with his heavy watch-chain; now with his loosened knee-buckles, and now trying to adjust a strange looking velvet cap over his abundant and beautiful hair, as white as threaded silver, and as fine and soft as thistle-down, or flossed silk, which threatened to be off up chimney, every time the outer door opened.

At last the countenance of the patriarch suddenly lighted up, and he fastened his eyes upon a large heavy gun of the Louisburg type which rested on two brackets made of enormous moose antlers, just over the smoke-stained mantel piece. This gun was always kept loaded with bullet or buck-shot, and always within reach, ready for use. He then got up and went to the window, without remembering his crutches—appearing

not to feel the rheumatism which had troubled him for the last month, and confined him to the house for a part of the time—and looked out into the driving storm, a whirlwind of sleet and snow, as if he had half a mind to face it.

Meanwhile, aunt Sarah made a sign to the schoolmaster, just as Lucy, having finished the talk with her, stole off to the parsonage, looking very pale and anxious. Ira drew up his chair, and they sat whispering together, with their eyes turned toward Uncle Jeremiah, till the schoolmaster, who seemed at first startled and terrified at first, grew sorrowful and serious; and then drawing a long breath, and laying his hand reverently on aunt Sarah's, he asked her, in a low, unsteady voice, "if he was to understand it as the wish of Lucy herself?"

"Yes, Master Burleigh; the poor child has been trying for the last three days to muster the courage to tell you herself; but she couldn't do it, she says, while there was a prospect of the marriage takin' place, after you had come so far and suffered so much; and now that the storm is likely to hinder it, nobody knows how long. She would rather die, she says, than tell you herself, for she knows it would break your heart."

"She is greatly mistaken, I assure you," said he, with some bitterness; "but I must see her, aunt Sarah—I must; then, if she says so, I will leave her in peace—and forever. There is some dreadful mystery about this matter; and we shall never come to a proper understanding, till I can talk with her face to face. If Lucy Day were a flirt or a trifler, I should set her free at once; but knowing her high principles, and generous temper, I must be cautious and patient with her. Much of all this must be owing to her convent education. I wish she had never seen Quebec! I have had my misgivings all day—indeed, I might call them—her behavior toward me for the last week has been so very strange."

"Strange!—how?"

"I can hardly give you an idea of it, in language, aunt Sarah; but I have felt it sorely; it has put a stop to my sleeping—I never sleep now."

"And a stop to your eatin', too, I should think—for you neither of you eat enough to keep a sparrow alive; and then you're both of you so about-minded! I often catch you both with tears in your eyes, and when I look up suddenly from my work, one of you is allers sure to be watchin' the other as a cat would a mouse."

At this moment Uncle Jerry turned away from the window. The conversation was dropped, the parsonage door opened slowly and softly, as if by preconcerted arrangement, and Lucy appeared, looking somewhat paler, if possible, but calm and self-possessed, though her large, clear eyes were full of a hidden sorrow, alike haughty, tender, and mournful.

Nobody spoke, and Burleigh did not even lift his eyes, but

sat motionless and silent with his hands nearly covering his face, evidently so occupied with some great, overmastering thought, as to be incapable of conversation. The Brigadier pushed away the checker-board with an impatient gesture, in passing, and swept most of the men into the table-drawer with a flourish of his coat-sleeve—whether intentionally, or otherwise, it were not easy to say. After a long silence, the Brigadier leaned over the table and grasped the hanging shelf with one of his large hands, while he reached after the powder-horn and bullet pouch with the other, until he set the shelf creaking and swinging, so as to frighten his wife and make poor Lucy move a little farther off; but the schoolmaster heard nothing and saw nothing of the whole.

"Yes, dear, an' it looks now, that rag carpet I was at work on all last summer for the bedroom, as if the dogs had had it," said aunt Sarah, in a subdued voice to Lucy, who, having crept up to her, was sitting on a block at her feet with her head in her lap, listening to some revelation which the old lady was making.

"Do tell!" said the girl.

"And, what's more, if I was her gran'f'ther—which, thank goodness, I'm not!—I'd give her sech a bastin' every time I ketched her up on the mow with the boys, arter hens' eggs, accordin' to her story, she'd wish her cake dough, or I miss my guess, the little peart, good-for-nothin' jade."

Lucy tried to interpose with a good word for poor Jerusha Jane, but her grandmother would not listen to her.

"Yes, indeed," continued aunt Sarah, "and I tell you, Lucy Day, that I shouldn't wonder a mite if it should turn out that she's at the bottom of all the mischief, and lookin', too, all the time as if better wouldn't melt in her mouth."

Barleigh withdrew his hands from his face, and they saw large drops of perspiration standing upon his temples and forehead. He seemed to be listening.

"I don't understand you, aunt Sarah."

"Why don't you call me grandmother, Leo?"

"Because everybody calls you aunt Sarah, and it seems younger."

"Well, what I wanted to say," continued her aunt, with a pleasant smile, "is just this: it's my belief that Jerusha Jane Pope turned them cittle loose arter they'd been held up," clapping her mouth closely, and shaking her head with a malicious emphasis.

"You don't say so! Goodness me! But why should she do such a thing?"

"Out o' spite, I'm a thinkin',"—with a glance at Barleigh.

"What's that, mother?" said Uncle Jerry; "what's that thee's sayin'?"

"We didn't mean you should Lear—mussy on us what's that?"

Children! chil—dren!" trying to get up out of the chair with a large wooden tray in her lap, "there goes the kitchen!"

"Or the new looking-glass you bought for me," whispered Loo-loo.

"Or that batch of crockery-ware on the entry table," aunt Sarah added.

"Stop that confounded noise, children!" shouted the Brigadier.

"Dear suz! dear suz!" continued aunt Sarah, as the strange noises, now from up-stairs and now from below, burst upon them in wild uproar; then jumping up, she tried to make her way through heaps of cored apples, dried pumpkin-strips, lots of unfinished patch-work, and piles of coarse blue stocking-yarn. "Do be quick, father! you see I can't stir an inch with all these traps about my legs!"

"Don't thee fret, mother!" said Uncle Jerry, bustling about, after a most unwieldy fashion, and trying to get her out of the scrape. "Don't thee, now!" But he only made matters worse. The more she wriggled and strove, the more hopelessly her feet were entangled. "High there! high! what's that?"

The back door opened with a loud bang. Then voices were heard in the porch, accompanied by a prodigious clattering and stamping, so that even Barleigh began to wake up and look about him, as if somewhat moved by the noise.

"There's our boy!" shouted Uncle Jerry. "This way, Luther, this way!—and if he don't want to see the top o' the house fly off, he'd better be spry."

More stamping of huge feet, and more thrashing of ponderous arms; then the inner door flew open, with a crash, and in walked—or wallowed, rather—a great overgrown belderly fellow, in a shaggy, fear-naught wrapper, loaded with damp snow, and looking not unlike a great polar bear on the rampage.

"Find the cows, Luther?"

"Yes, father, all safe; but I rather guess I'd a pretty tough job on't, gettin' 'em back through the snow-drifts and into the cow-yard, with nobody to help me."

"Nobody to help thee! Why, where's Patsie?"

"Off to the singin' school with Liddy, I rather guess."

"What wast' frightened 'em, Luther? and how the plague did they get loose?"

"No idee, father."

"Wolves or bears?" whispered Lucy.

"Can't say. I didn't ben able to find so much as one single track; snow's drifted amazin', and I shouldn't wonder if there was two or three feet on a level in the woods."

"Wal, wal, my boy, glad to see thee; patty much tired out by this time, hey?"

"Ruther guess I be! Got any o' them baked beans left, mother?"

Up jumped Lucy.

"That's right, child; fly round and get somethin' hearty for supper," said aunt Sarah; "a bowl o' puddin' an' milk, or milk-porridge, with a good fat slice of rye-and-Indian, wouldn't come amiss, I dare say."

"Take off your things, Luther," continued his father, "and draw up a chair an' set down, and make yourself at home, afore you tell us any thing more about your tramp."

"Yes, father; but I want to know what all that uproar was I heard a-comin' up to the house; and what's the meanin' of all them lights in the winders?"

"Lights in the winders!—what winders, Luther?"

"Up-stairs, in every winder; garret an' all, father, at the back o' the house, and on the tother end!"

The Brigadier turned to his wife with a puzzled look.

"Them plaguy young-ones agin!" said the old woman. "Such carryin's on, you never *did* see in all your life, Luther Hooper, I'll be bound. Racin' up and down stairs, and through all the empty chambers, an' snow ballin' father, and smashin' round consider'ble everywhere, so as to frighten some of us e'en-a-most out of our senses"—glancing at Burleigh and then at Lucy, who, having furnished the table, now sat afar off with her eyes nearly shut, and her whole countenance rigid with intense thought, so far as they could judge by an occasional glimpse, when she shifted her position to avoid the light.

And the schoolmaster—what ailed him? Was he sound asleep? or only lost over a sum in fellowship? for old Pike charred and defaced, lay open before him still, though he hadn't turned a leaf, since they entered upon the first game of checkers.

"Oh, never mind him," said Uncle Jerry; "he doozn't hear a word we're sayin', and wouldn't, if it thundered."

A slight nervous giggle from behind Uncle Jerry's chair betrayed the whereabouts of somebody who did hear, and who seemed to hear now with uncommon relish—a relish altogether disproportioned to the occasion, however.

By the time Luther had got off his heavy, steaming, outside garments, and rolled up his trousers and cleared his neck of the damp snow, and seated himself by the great, roaring fire, with a table before him, so heaped with "hearty vittels" that a stranger would have mistaken it for a family supper, there was another loud rattling outburst of noises from a distant part of the house; but, whether from above or below, it were no easy matter to say.

"There they go agin, Luther! Jump, Lucy dear, jump!" screeched aunt Sarah, half crazy with vexation; "I believe my soul the house is haunted!"

At this outcry from his wife, Uncle Jerry's chair gave a great lurch, and leaning forward, as if to satisfy himself that he had

not misunderstood her, he rested both elbows on the table, with his large hands shading his eyes, and began studying her countenance with a singular expression of anxiety and distress. Yet he said nothing; and as nobody seemed to notice his remark—not even the schoolmaster—he gradually settled down into his chair, and let things take their course.

In obedience to a look from his mother, and a sign from Lucy, Luther sprung up from the seat, and tumbled into the kitchen, where all the noises appeared to converge for a moment. He was followed, after two or three unwieldy strides, by the Brigadier, with his wide-open waistcoat and white hair flowing loose, leaving the inner door half open behind him, so that the strong light of the kitchen-fire, reflected from the whitewashed ceiling, brightened up the whole entry, and all the lower part of the stairway.

Strangely enough, nothing was to be seen; and, after a moment more, nothing to be heard—nothing whatever.

"Wal, I declare! that beats me," said Luther, turning to his father for explanation; but his father seemed unwilling to meet his eye, and stood still with a bewildered look, as if somewhat puzzled, and a little frightened.

At last, however, seeming to recollect himself, he began shouting at the top of his voice, "*Children! Children!*" so that he might have been heard half a mile off, but for the storm that was raging.

Still there was no answer. Then they went forward, both together, opened the door of the bedroom, and looked in, but stood still, holding their breath and listening. No sound followed—no sound of life or motion. A deadlike stillness prevailed above and below, whenever there was a lull in the storm outside.

"Pesky strange, Luther, hey?" said his father; "where's there think them noises come from?"

"From right here, father, just where we're standing," said Luther, creeping up to the side of the old man, with trembling eagerness, and speaking in a sort of trembled whisper.

"Children can't be asleep," said his father; "but how the plague they could get out of the way so quick, and without makin' any noise—that's what puzzles me."

"Wal, father," said aunt Sarah, looking in at the half-open door, and shading her eyes with one hand, while she held up a bit of smoking pitchwood with the other, "what are you looking at there? and what on earth are you expectin' to see? and what's all that whisperin' about, I should like to know?"

"What whisperin', wife?"

"What whisperin'? Why you ain't deaf, are you?"

"Oh yes—I understand; but leave us now, there's a good soul; and, after we have satisfied ourselves, we'll have the mystery cleared up in some way."

Aunt Sarah took the hint, and returned to her work over the tray of apples.

"Luther!"

"Yes, father."

"I should almost think the Old Scratch himself had somethin' to do with that whisperin' your mother heerd jess now."

"Don't, father, don't!" said Luther, his teeth beginning to chatter, and his knees to tremble.

"What did mother mean jess now, when she said she thought the house must be haunted?"

"Can't say, father; but sometimes we *do* hear most unaccountable noises, that's a fact, father; and they *do* say, it used to be haunted in the old Indian wars ever so long ago, and—Oh Lord, what's that?"

"Where, father, where? I don't see any thing."

"Nor I, father,"—coming up still closer to the old man; "but I hear a sort o' whisperin'—a kind o' low breathin', father, don't you? a sort of a—there 'tis agin! Oh Lord!"

The old man touched his son's elbow, and called his attention to the open doorway, which was crowded with pale, eager faces—Aunt Sarah and Lucy holding each other by the hand; Peletiah, the hired man, looking over their shoulders, with his red, bushy hair almost blazing in the light, and the schoolmaster standing on tip-toe, stretched up, trying to see over all their heads, and looking uncommonly serious, and evidently wondering where the strange noises came from, more especially the whispering, which seemed very near at times. The very air of the room seemed to be alive with the mysterious yet inarticulate language.

"What is it, father! what is it?" said Aunt Sarah, stealing a step or two nearer, with Lucy clinging to her hand, as if afraid to let go, and trembling from head to foot.

"Nothin' at all, wife, nothin' at all," said her husband. "No children hereabouts, now; all quiet enough, thee sees."

"But the whisperin'—where does that come from?"

"Wal, can't say jess now; for sometimes it seems to be down cellar, and sometimes in the very next room; then agin it's right here, all round us."

"The pesky children, I dare say," said Peletiah, with large, staring eyes, and a half-smothered, nervous chuckle.

"The *lamented* critters!" added Aunt Sarah, turning once more to go back to her duties; "but I *should* like to find out ef that Jerry Jay Jane Pope ain't at the bottom of all the mischief and all the towse. I wish you would satisfy yourself now, afore you go to roost, will you, father?"

"Leave it all to me, wife; and you jess go back, all of you, into the kitchen, and shut the door, and keep still, and don't move nor show yourselves agin, till I speak. But you may leave us a candle; get a candle, Luther, will yo? And now,"

he continued, in a subdued tone, as they all withdrew, closing the kitchen-door after them, and Luther appeared with a large bayberry candle, "now, Luther," pointing up the stairway, and making a sign for him to look up, "mind, now, not a word of all of this to mother, not a word, for thy life--ah! did thee speak?"

"No, father."

"So, so! nothin' to be leerd; nothin' to be seer; and no mischief done, so far as I can judge," continued the old man, looking more and more puzzled, and muttering to himself in a way that frightened poor Luther.

"Don't move, Luther! don't stir!" he called, after a short pause, during which the sounds appeared to die away in a distant part of the house, now like hurried, impatient whisperings, and now like the pattering of naked feet over the garret floor and along the roof—sounds distinct and audible, and not to be mistaken.

"Most unaccountable, to be sure!" continued the old man; taking the candle from Luther, and bidding him watch the stairs and allow nothing to pass, he opened the door of the best room, and, holding up the candle as high as he could reach, stood still and listened. Then he looked up the stairway, and then he stepped back suddenly, as if something had touched his elbow: there was a sound like that of two or three voices in low and earnest conversation.

The old man was greatly disturbed. He looked at Luther without speaking, and Luther looked at him. After a moment's pause, he hurried through a back passage-way, leading to the woodhouse; then into the pantry, then down cellar, followed by Luther, with chattering teeth and a very unsteady step.

More and more troubled, his father continued talking to himself in a strange way, stopping and listening at every few steps, till poor Luther began to hear noises all about him, in the air and underneath his feet.

"No crockery out of place—tin-kitchen where it belongs—and lookin'-glass where they left it, all safe," muttered the patriarch, at brief intervals, with an expression of growing uneasiness, which frightened poor Luther more than any thing else that had happened. "No, no; I can not understand it and what's more, my boy, *I don't like it!*"

"Don't believe what, father?"

"Don't believe the stories they tell about the Blaisdell family nor about the house bein' haunted by spirits."

"Why, father, what do you mean?"

"But if they should be true," continued the old man, in a still lower voice, and as if talking to himself, "if they should, my great bargain may turn out a poor spec, after all."

"Bears the bugs, father."

"And, if the stories should get abroad, and all the facts be proved, just as they were sworn to in the affidavies I see'd, all made by honest witnesses," continued the father, without heeding his boy's remark, "why, then," covering his eyes with both hands, and speaking hurriedly, "why, then, good by to all my labour and management for half a lifetime—it must all go for nothing; and mother and the children will be no better off than the Blaisdell heirs. He stopped suddenly, and caught with both hands at the stair-rail.

"Father! father! what's the matter, father? What ails you?" cried Luther, in a voice of terror, which was instantly followed by a bustle in the kitchen.

"Be quiet, boy—don't be frightened; mother is comin' this way—I hear steps—not a word to her, or to Lucy, nor to Master Burleigh—not a word now, remember!"

"Well, father, what luck?" said aunt Sarah, opening the kitchen-door a little way, and looking into the entry; "have you ketched her at it?"

"Ketched who?"

"Jerusha Jane?"

"Oh, get out!"

"Have you been up stairs to look at the other children?"

"No"—glancing at Luther—"but I do wish you would go up yourself, mother. My rheumatiz won't allow me to go up softly enough."

"Rather late in the day, father, if you wanted to ketch 'em at their tantrums; but, howsomever, I b'lieve I will jist run up a moment, and see what they've got to say for themselves."

And up she went, on tiptoe, the stairs creaking with every step; for aunt Sarah was a rather large woman; and though much younger than her husband, he was the more alert of the two, except when troubled with a touch of the rheumatism, got in his lumbering operations, and coming and going at will.

The children were found all fast asleep, and most of them with their heads under the bed-clothes; honestly asleep. There was clearly no make believe—no counterfeiting now. And they all agreed in the same story, when she shook them up, and questioned them, from the oldest to the youngest. Not one of them had been out of bed since amity Loo-loo had left them; but they complained of strange noises all about the room, and of whispering up garret, or in the chimney, and Jerusha Jane, with wild, staring eyes and white lips, declared that her bed had been lifted up under her, and that she had seen something, she didn't know what, go by the window.

"Oh, fiddlestick!" said aunt Sarah; "go to sleep, all of you, and let us have no more of such nonsense. The storm has turned all your heads, I should think."

Having reported to her husband, he went back to the leather

bottomed chair, and, telling Luther to get a shovel and clear out the snow from the front entry, Uncle Jerry leaned forward on both elbows, and covered his face with his hands. Not another word was spoken for several minutes, till, moved by a sudden impulse, he looked up and asked what day of the month it was.

"The twenty-fifth!"

"The twenty-fifth!" he exclaimed; "the twenty-fifth day of February! The very day Miss Moody died! It's all true, then. I might have known it!" Then he lifted his aged hands for a moment in prayer, but without uncovering or kneeling. "The Lord be merciful unto us, and deliver us from the snare of the adversary!" he said, solemnly.

And then a deep stillness followed. The long-silent clock sounded *nine*! or three times three, with pauses between: and all eyes were turned toward the door opening into the best room.

"Perhaps Master Burleigh would be willing to offer a word of prayer," said Lucy, in a low, timid, hesitating voice.

Burleigh looked at aunt Sarah, but finding little encouragement there, turned to her husband.

"If thee please, Iry," said the kind-hearted old man, with a quavering voice; "we never had more need of prayer, I can tell thee," laying off his broad-brimmed hat, as he spoke, to the amazement of all the family.

The schoolmaster dropped upon his knees, and, bowing his head very low, and speaking so that his words were nearly inaudible, he offered a brief petition with abundant thanksgiving, in language so simple and so tender, so earnest and so sorrowful, as to bring tears into the eyes, not only of the Brigadier and of Lucy—who knelt by grandmother's chair, with her head in her lap, like an over-wearied child—but of grandmother herself.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLOVEN FOOT.

THE next morning two strangers made their appearance at the breakfast-table, without a word of explanation or apology. They were broad-shouldered, rough-looking men of large stature; and, but for their long, heavy coats, breeches, and hunting-knives, might have passed for Indian men.

But where had they slept? and why had they come through the woods, and in at the back door? Had they got lost? or were they unacquainted with the river road? Nobody knew and no questions were asked.

They seated themselves, in silence, without a word of salutation—though both *noted* to the master of the house—and set to work as if well-nigh famished. But instead of the cheerful conversation that all were accustomed to, there was a feeling of embarrassment and restraint with the family, which led first to a lowering of their voices, and then to downright silence. The strangers, however, were too busy, and too much in earnest, to be troubled by the change, even supposing them to have been acquainted with the heads of the household. Not once did they look up, till they had finished their breakfast, and removed away almost every thing within reach. Having been asked to help themselves, and to make themselves at home, they had clearly done their best, even to a half-peck of the baked fish and potatoes.

Toward morning, the wind had chopped round to the north. It had cleared off cold—so cold that the bear-skin caps, shaggy locks, and rough beards of the two strangers were stiffened with icicles and hoar frost, while their great-coats would have stood alone when they first entered the house.

It looked half an hour of sunrise when they sat down to breakfast; but the great north-eastern sky was all red and fiery, as with the glow of a coming conflagration, streaming and flaming away up to the zenith like the northern lights, and along the sloping undulations and glittering crust for miles upon miles, as if the dark, solemn woods beyond were all on fire.

The grand countenance of the patriarch, who sat facing the windows, underwent a variety of startling changes, from the paleness of death to the warm, rich tint of robust manhood, as the paper curtains, half rolled up, swung to and fro, and flapped in the draft of the cellar-way and open porch, letting in the glory of a *zari* sunrise upon his white head, like that crown of righteousness which he had won. He sat very thoughtful, and rather abstractedly, but there was, too, an expression of somber anxiety upon his features, which even his wife, as she looked upon him, which had never seen before. It troubled her; but, with two silent strangers at the table, it was no time for explanations.

When they were nearly through breakfast, and while the old man was reflecting with himself whether he should recede a moment to the table, and ask one of the strangers to offer prayer, the door opened softly behind him, and the hired man appeared, all out of breath, looking very pale and eager, and bearing looking signs to Luther, unobserved by the heads of the family.

Luther pushed back his chair and started up.

"Why, Luther! What's the matter?" said his mother.

"Nuttin', mother; only I want to say something to Pal'tiah 'bout shovein' a path to the cow-yard, afore Liddy gets back."

"Liddy! why, where's she gone?" said grandfather.

"Wal, she went home for a day or two," replied his wife.

"Went home! What for?"

"Oh, she got frightened, night afore last, when she was out milkin'," said Jerusha, "and she vowed she wouldn't stay another night under this roof; no, not if you'd give her the farm, grandfather."

"Frightened—how?"

"Wal, grandmother, what am I to do? Here's grandfather asking me to tell him how she was frightened, and you and aunt Lucy makin' signs for me not to answer."

"I do wish you knew enough to hold your tongue, Jerushy Jane Pope! and only speak when you're spoken to," said grandmother.

"Never mind, wife; but jess tell me what frightened her, if thee please, Jerushy."

"Well, grandf'ther, she told me arter she had got into bed, and was able to talk so as to be understood—oh, how she did tremble, to be sure! and how her teeth did chatter—she told me how't, jist as she'd finished milkin', she heard the cattle snort, and happenin' to look up she saw a pair of great, starin', monstrous eyes looking down at her, over the top of that high fence back o' the cattle-shed; and she thought she saw horns away up in the air, and something like a horse's head, the largest she ever saw in her life; and she was so scared that she left her milk-pail and started for the house, but before she got to the back door, she fell down in a fit, and, if grandmother hadn't been going to the well then, she might have perished in the snow."

"Nonsense, child."

"Nonsense or not, grandmother, she never slept a wink all night; and when we heard the squealin' of the pigs, and the screamin' of the old sow, and the noise of the cattle breakin' away through the fences, and scammin' off into the woods yender, she got up and dressed, and vowed she'd never sleep another night under this roof."

"Wife, did you know of this?"

"To be sure I did; but I never pay no attention to such stories. Liddy, as you know, is a poor little weak simpleton; and, as for Jerushy Jane, there's no believin' a word she says. But here's Luther waitin' for you to tell him what he shall do."

The father nodded to him and looked at the door. Luther understood the sign, and hurried away—the strangers wondering at all they saw, and interchanging looks of inquiry.

Before they had got fairly settled down to the rest of their work, however, and while the good old man was reverently preparing the Bible, by wiping the dust off the cover with his coat-sleeve, and clearing a place on the table, the door opened

with sudden violence, and in rushed Luther all out of breath, looking wild and laggard, with his hat off, and hair flying loose!

"Father!" said he, in a husky voice—"father! you're wanted!"

"Wanted—where?"

"Out in the cow-yard—right away!"

"I should think he'd seen a spirit," whispered Lucy, to the stranger at her elbow; but instead of answering her with a smile, as she expected, he turned to Luther, and grew more and more serious. Leaning toward his companion, he said something in a low voice, which made him look up at the old man, with an expression that troubled her.

"Come, father, come!" continued Luther, "we have no time to lose; we want you to see something; it may be gone before we get there, if we don't hurry."

The old man started up with uncommon alacrity, and followed Luther to a part of the cow-yard just under the eaves, where Liddy had seen the specter; and there, just there, stood Luther, trembling and half speechless, with eyes fixed upon a hole in the high fence, and pointing to the print of a large cloven foot in the snow beyond.

"You see, father," said he, catching at the old man's arm, "you see, now, that poor Liddy told the truth. It was just here she see'd the great, starin' eyes lookin' down at her over the top of the fence, and the shaggy foretop, and the great, branching horns, away up in the air!"

"Wal," said his father, getting up from his knees, after a thorough examination of the track, "that beats all nater!" and then he fell to rubbing his hands.

"Why, father, you don't seem at all skeered."

"Not much, my boy; where's Paltiah?"

"Gone off to the minister's."

"The blockhead! What dooz he want o' the minister, I should like to know?"

"But, father, I say though, that's a cloven foot, ain't it?"

"Sartin!"

"And it ain't the track of any thing hereabouts, father? Tain't a cattle-track, hey?"

"No, my boy."

"Wal, then—"

"Are my snow-shoes in good order?"

"Yls, father; but what do you want to do with snow-shoes?"

"And my old gun—is she all right in business?"

"All ready?—to be sure she is; but, good gracious, father, what do you mean?"

The old man chuckled, stooped down, brushed away the snow, and took another look at the foot-print; then fell to rubbing his hands again.

Father, I say, father! You're not goin' arter the Old Scratch himself, with snow-shoes and a shot-gun, are you?"

"Any small dogs about here, Luther—little fellows, I mean, smart as a steel-trap, not heavy enough to break through the crust, but ready to fly at the heels of any thing. Old Scratch, or cariboo?"

"Yes, plenty; sharp for rabbits and foxes, and not much afraid o' wolves; but, if you want dogs, why not take old Watch? His teeth's good yet, and, after he once gets his foot there's no let go to him; and we can master half a dozen more as big as he is, and a good deal spryer."

"Large dogs won't do, Luther, my boy. They'll get trampled to death. I've seen them pitched twenty feet into the air, and if they break through the crust, it's all over with 'em."

"Trampled to death! Pitched into the air! What do you mean, father?" said he; "what on earth air you talkin about?"

"Luther!"

"Sir."

"Have you any idea what that cloven foot means? Get down on your knees, my boy, and steady it well."

"Yes, father."

"Do you think you would know it, if you should ever see it again?"

"Yes, father."

"Wal,—and what d'ye think it is?"

"Wal! if 'tain't the footmark of the Old Gentleman himself, then I don't know—"

"Don't be a fool, Luther Hooper!"

Luther began to grow uneasy, to look about for help, and to study his father's countenance. He had never seen him in that humor before; he seemed so full of downy, English frolic and fun, that the boy hardly knew how to understand him.

"Luther?"

"Wal, father."

"What should you say, if I told you that that was a *moose-track*?"

Luther threw up his hands with a cry.

"A moose-track, father! Who ever heard tell of a moose-track in this part of the world? All you say?"

"Sure! Haven't I hunted for moose with the Canucks to Labrador, and all over the St. Lawrence, for fifty years? and don't I know all about him, *hey?*"

"Hurrah for our side, father!"

"To be sure. I never heard tell of one hereabouts; they don't like the smell of the sea, and I haven't seen his track since we fass come to live here. But well have him, as sure as my

name is Jeremiah Hooper. Come, come, off with you, and get my snow-shoes, and two or three neighbors, and the guns, and powder-horns, and bullet-pouches, and the dogs; and ask Paltiah to come along with two or three blankets and a pile of sheep-skins, and we'll go to the house and vittle for the 'yge."

"But your rheumatism, father; shan't I bring your crochets?"

"My crochets! Crochets be hang'd! And as for my rheumatiz, my boy, jies look here." Up went his leg, and away went Luther's hat into the lay-mow.

The old man had been a famous wrestler in his time at arm's length; and this was one of his tricks, that nobody was ever prepared for.

Luther began to feel happier, to breathe more freely, and, just then the mother's voice was heard calling to them from the back porch.

"Ay, ay, mother! we'll be with you in a moment," said the old man, recollecting for the first time that he had not finished his breakfast, by reading a chapter of the Bible; so off he started for the house on a sort of gallop, like that of a rhinoceros, wallowing through the deep snow, and leaving Luther to follow him by a more roundabout path.

On his way, he saw Bealeigh stoop and pick up something by the porch-door; and, when he got nearer, Uncle Jerry found him trying to make out what was written on a piece of dirty-looking paper, turning it upside down and inside-out, as if to find the handwriting, or address, or name, or date, and then, all at once, looking as if a thunderbolt had exploded at his feet.

"Wal!" said the old man, as he stood in the porch-door, stamping off the snow; "what's to pay now, hy? I es is troubled."

"Uncle Jeremiah, do you know that handwriting?" said the schoolmaster, holding the crumpled sheet of paper toward him, and waiting, with lips apart, for the answer: "don't read it, sir, if you please; but just say if you know the writing."

Uncle Jeremiah took it in his hands, glanced over it, but shook his head.

"Ever see it before?"

"Never, to my knowledge; what is it?"

"Excuse me; the secret has come into my possession by feeling, and I dare not allow anybody to share it with me, but I know more."

"Come, come, father! and you, too, Mr. Bealeigh," continued aunt Sarah. "Let us finish up the breakfast, and then we shall be ready for the business of the day. Bible's waitin' for you."

They went into the house together, sat down to the table,

and, after a chapter was read, the strangers were asked to offer prayer. Both refused with signs of embarrassment; and the schoolmaster returned thanks in a low, troubled voice. The moment he was through, he pushed back his chair, and hurried away; but he was not gone long. After a few minutes he returned, and there were those who remembered that he was very pale—pale as death—and that his eyelashes were heavy with moisture.

Standing in the doorway, he made a sign to Lucy, and asked if he could see her in the best room for five minutes.

"Certainly," she answered, with a timid, eager, trembling voice, and immediately followed him.

Entering the next room, he shut the door, dropped the latch, and flung open the nearest shutters; then, taking out the crumpled paper, asked her if she remembered it.

Taken wholly by surprise, and greatly moved, she began a reply, and then snatched at the paper. But, failing to reach it, covered her face with her hands, and dropped into the nearest chair, and began sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Give me that paper, sir!" said she, at last recovering herself; and, rising from the chair, she confronted him with an expression of unutterable bitterness and scorn.

"Excuse me, for the present, Lucy. After I have had a little talk with you, it is yours; but, just now—excuse me."

"Have you read it, sir?"

"Yes."

"By what right, I pray?"

"Allow me to explain. I wanted to find a signature, and ran my eyes over it hurriedly, hoping to find some clue; but, not being able to find either address or signature, I was obliged to read it."

"Obliged to read it, were you? Why so?"

"To find out to whom it belonged."

"And how came you by it, sir, allow me to ask?"

"I found it on the steps of the porch, on my way up to the cow-yard, fifteen minutes ago; shall I read it now?"

"With all my heart, sir—and aloud, if you please."

"Will you be so good while I read it, Miss Lucy?"

"No, Mr. Barlow, I prefer to listen."

The schoolmaster then read as follows, with great steadiness of look and great calmness; yet his hand shook, and the paper rustled beneath his fingers, and there was a slight vibration of his voice, which seemed to trouble his listener, for she turned away suddenly, looking her face flushed, and looked out of the window, as if to conceal her face from his mournful eyes. It began simply, and it written at full speed, or on horseback. The handwriting was hurried and scratchy; the writer had evidently no words to throw away—no time to waste:

"DEAREST—One word only: I must leave you to manage this whole matter in your own way. Unless you are actually married to that Burleigh, when you receive this, all I ask of you is that you will signify your wish for further delay. Leave the rest to me.

"The old moose-hunter will be my friend, for he was the friend both of my father and grandfather, and when he comes to know me, as he will before long, I have no doubt of his hearty co-operation, for the sake of 'Auld Lang Syne.'

"What I have so often said before, dearest, I say now. I can not live without you, and I will not. I have gone too far and suffered too much; woe to the man who dares to interfere between us. I am no longer to be trifled with. Love me, dearest, and be patient. Yours, forever and ever,

"Feb. 26.

E. O. F."

Having finished reading the paper, he handed it to Lucy, saying: "Have you any explanations to offer?"

"None whatever."

"Any questions to ask?"

"Yes, one. I thought I understood you to say that you were obliged to read the letter because there was no signature, and you wanted to find out the writer or the owner."

"You understood me aright. I did not say there were no initials; but, as I had never met with nor heard of E. O. F., how shall I know where to look for him?"

"One more question, if you please. I presume you found no difficulty, sir, when you reached this part of the letter, where these words occur: 'Unless you are already married to that Mr. Burleigh,' in satisfying yourself about the ownership of the letter?"

The schoolmaster reddened and bowed.

"And you must have understood who was meant by the old moose-hunter."

The schoolmaster bowed again.

"And yet," continued the now imperious young woman, lifting herself with a haughtiness of bearing worthy of an outraged princess, "and yet, sir, you finished reading the letter though, if you had not known whose it was, you well knew whose it was not. Good morning, sir."

"One moment, Lucy."

She smiled scornfully, and, with a toss of the head, signified that he might proceed.

"I, too, have a question to ask."

"If you please."

"Did you know of the conversation I had with your aunt, last evening, about our marriage?"

"Our marriage?"

"Our intended marriage, I should say."

"Yea."

"Did you authorize her to say for you what you wanted the courage to say for yourself?"

"I did, sir."

"And why did you not come to me with your own beautiful frankness—frank and fearless I have always found you, Lucy—and let me know the worst out of your own mouth? It would have been much easier to bear."

"If you must know, it was because I could not do it, sir; I knew you too well—I respected you too much, and I paid you too much."

"Paid me, Lucy? And was there nothing truer than pity to restrain you?"

"I have nothing more to say, Mr. Barleigh. Good-morning, sir."

"God help me, Lucy! I can not part with you so; I tremble at the consequences, and more, I believe, on your account than on my own."

"You are very obliging, sir."

"And you have no explanation to give?"

"None, sir."

"And we are to separate—we are to part so—we who have known each other so long, and loved each other so sincerely—we are to be parted forever, because you will do nothing, say nothing to lighten the misery that weighs upon me like a mountain."

His voice faltered. Lucy turned away; a tear fell upon her sleeve.

"Let me take your hand, for a moment."

She reached her hand sideways, and he took it between both of his, and was stepping to set his foot upon it, when she snatched it away, and hurried out of the room. He saw her no more till he joined the party of hunters and started off on the track of the great bull-moose which had been troubling the neighborhood for a week or ten days before. These days of the night previous had set them all wild.

When the Brigadier had passed and Mr. Barleigh his word or two of thanks given, the hunter looked upon the enlightened father with a new and very different feeling.

"A mouse-track since the day before," said one of the strangers; "what odd I tell you, Barleigh? The other was on the track almost heavy enough to push a stone and knock up into the fire-place."

"Well, I do, I would not let it go, and if you had not of my ventures after the great get her I should be home. I should have gone back to the logging-camp and let you go after the bull-moose by yourself." I say, old gentleman, if you please."

The Brigadier looked at the stranger without speaking, till his eye quivered, and he uttered, "Brigadier—if you please."

The old man bowed and smiled, and straightway they fell

into conversation together. It was very soon discovered that the two strangers were well acquainted with the old moose-hunter, by reputation, and were determined to make the most of their opportunities.

"We followed the tracks for thirty miles, and lost them just on the edge of the woods over there," said the elder of the two, pointing to the farthest hill-top in sight.

"He must have a yard somewhere, and not very far off, nyther," said the old man. "If we go to work right away, in earnest, we shall have him as sure as a gun, and the cow, and most likely a calf or two, before the week is over; but we shall have a tramp for it. Did you see any browsing where you found the tracks?"

"Not much; but if you will go with us we'll show you where we first fell in with his beat, and where we first heard the clattering of his hoofs, as he went rattling over the crust, tearing his way through the undergrowth and cutting his shins at every leap."

"Oh ho! Did he bellow much?" said the Brigadier, hardly able to sit still, as Luther bustled about with the supplies, the blankets, the sheep-skins and the snow-shoes.

"Yes, indeed; more like a herd of buffaloes in the gorge of a mountain, than like one solitary moose, Joe, hey?"

Joe signified his assent, as he looked at the priming of his gun, with the muzzle carefully directed up-chimney.

Luther and Peleiah now made their appearance, both trembling with eagerness and expectation.

"We must have out all the sleighs we can muster, boys," said the old man, standing with one foot on the settle, strapping on his long woolen buskins with the readiness of twenty-five, and talking all the time, now with himself, and now with one or another of those gathered about him, with their guns, ready to join the party, but never hearing a word in reply; his countenance all in a glow, and his clear blue eyes glittering, as they did at the last raising, followed by the clam-bake and the wrestling-match, when he overthrew the champion of the whole country by main strength, at Indian bay.

"All the sleighs, father?—double sleigh and all?"

"Yes, if you're all agoin'; we shall want 'em all, and the light sled, too, for the hay, and oats, and provisions, and the poles, and axes, and two or three boards and a saw, till we have made our camp, after which we shall have to cut our own fodder."

"You don't think of taking the path we did, Gin'ra.?"

The Brigadier started; he had not been addressed by that title since he left the service.

"No, for you came through the woods most of the way, didn't you?"

"Yea."

"And where did you first see the tracks?"

"Near Moosehead Lake."

"Ah; did you strike the path anywhere, or see any thing of the cow and her calves?"

"No, sir; we didn't even see the bull, but we heard him tearing through the undergrowth, and over the logs, and we found one place where he had been stripping the trees."

"How large were they?"

"Some as large as your thigh, sir." Luther looked up in amazement.

"How do they do it, father?" said he.

"Wal, they reach up as high as they can, and press the harl pad that is on the ruff 'o the mouth agin the tree, and scrapin' upwards with their sharp, gouging teeth, strip off the bark sometimes for seven or eight feet above the snow."

"Posserble!"

"And then, too, that upper lip o' theirs, thangs down four inches or so—they make use o' that, you see, in reaching arter the young, tender branches; and they hold 'em between the forelegs till the twigs are all eaten up. But, I say, though, we mustn't stand here chatterin' all day. Come, hustle, hustle, wife. Stir your stumps, Luther. Get up the horses and provender. Pal'tiah; and, I say, wife, got any of your twice-baked on hand?"

The stranger, who stood nearest, looked up in surprise.

"Oh, that's the name we give to lashed fish and potatoes down this way, when it's warmed over. You know what we want, mother. Plenty of raw fat pork, plenty of rye-and-Indian bread, apple-pies, dough-nuts, pork-and-beans, coffee, molasses, a jug of old Santa Cruz or Jamaica, a canister of tea—"

"Same as you would for the loggin'-camp, hey?" said his wife.

"Jess so."

"But, I say, *you*, Mister," continued the Brigadier, turning to the stranger, who stood watching his movements with deep interest, "there's two or three questions I want to ask, afore we stir a peg, so't we mayn't start off on a wild goose chase."

"Ask away, sir."

"How near can we go with the skighs to the place where you found the trees peeled?"

"Within two or three miles by skirting the woods."

"What kind o' growth was it jin'rally where they browsed?"

"Maple gin'rally, but all hard-wood."

"Oh, ho! Ah, ha!" rubbing his hands, and almost dancing, as he continued: "but maybe you're old hunters yourselves, and know all about these critters?"

"No; we are but young hunters, Gin'ral; but we've heard o' you in our part o' the country, and have come to you for the information we want."

"Indeed! What may I call your name?"

"Frazier. Maybe you've not forgotten your old major—Major Bob Frazier?"

"No, indeed!"

"Well, sir, we are two of his boys, and there's eight more of us ready to answer when the roll's called."

"And how is the old gentleman?"

"The old gentleman has been dead these five-and-twenty years; but we know all about you from our older brothers."

"Oh, ho! But there's one more question I must ask."

"If you please."

"Did you look to see if the trees were barked *below* the snow?"

"No, sir; but if they were, what then?"

"Why, then, the moose you're after wouldn't be found in that neighborhood, and we must go further off to find the yard. Was there much of a path?"

"Yes; you'd a' thought the cattle had been there."

"Good! The mother and calves—and there's gin'rally two of 'em. They allers let the bull lead off, and they follow in his track, mother fust."

The conversation was continued till Luther burst in with: "All ready, father!" and the jingling of the sleigh-bells, and the yelping of the curs, and the loud bark of old Watch, with the thermometer down to thirty below zero, set all their eyes dancing, and all their mittens, and sheep-skins, and mufflers, agog.

"And so you are goin' with us, Iry, hey?" said Uncle Jeremiah, as he saw the schoolmaster move toward the porch, with his gun over his arm, and a white wolf-skin cap pulled over his ears. "Why, how pale you are. Nothin' the matter, I hope?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir."

"Ever have any thing to do with moose, hey?"

"Something."

"Wal, if ever!" said Jerusha; "if that ain't jess like him!"

"Goodness me! what is there he don't know!" exclaimed aunt Sarah. "I shouldn't wonder if he'd been arter moose from the cradle."

Her husband laughed, and rolled about and shook all over, as he continued mulling up and pulling on his mittens, stepping out so briskly as to astonish everybody. "Ever fetch a moose, hey?" said he, slapping him on the back.

The schoolmaster nodded and seemed about to reply, but turned hastily to the window; for just then a light step was heard approaching the door, and then low whispering on the outside, as of children trying to persuade somebody to do something. "Oh, fiddle-de-dee! why not?" said Jerusha; "why not say good by to him? Why not part friends? If you only saw how pale he looked!"

"I suppose we all understand now," said aunt Sarah, with a somewhat inquisitive look, as she stood in the doorway, trying

to adjust her husband's fur cap, so as to cover his ears, "the real cause of all the uproar night afore last, among the cattle."

"Oh, yes; night afore last," said her husband. "Certainly. The moose looked over the fence and sported, and they broke loose and scampered off into the woods."

"And that explains the fright of Liddy, hey?"

"To be sure," trying to get away without farther explanations, for the strangers were evidently listening with deep interest, and the sleighs were at the door.

"But how about the noises down cellar and overhead last night, husband? I don't well see what the moose had to do with them?"

"Nor I neither, wife," glancing at the strangers; "but maybe our young friends here can help us to an explanation?"

They shook their heads.

"Perhaps you would have no objection to tell us where you spent the night?"

"Not the least in the world. We were on the tramp all night long, wallowing through deep snow most of the time."

"But when you first reached the house, what time was it?"

"A little after daybreak."

"And you were not here in the night, nor in the evening, hey?"

"Here! No, indeed! You know what time we came in by the back door."

"Yes, and you hadn't stopped anywhere on the way?"

"No. But why do you ask? We were plowing through the deep snow, half the time without snow-shoes, from about four o'clock yesterday in the afternoon, till near sunrise in the morning, and were both of us just ready to drop, when we stumbled upon your house, and found you all at breakfast."

"Of course, then," said aunt Sarah, "these strangers had nothing to do with the disturbance last night."

"Of course not," echoed her husband, taking the schoolmaster by the arm and hurrying him to the door, as he saw him just on the point of making some answer. "Leave it where it is, Iry," he added; "time enough to enlighten her after we have killed the moose, and satisfied ourselves about the mystery."

The schoolmaster nodded assent, and looked very serious.

"I must have some talk with you, Iry, when we are by ourselves," continued the Brigadier, in a voice not intended for his wife.

But she heard him nevertheless; and, as they went down the back steps, and the heavy door shut after them, she threw up both hands, and tossing her head, exclaimed: "There it is again! That Iry Barleigh knows every thing! and if he isn't at the bottom of all this, why then"—she stopped suddenly, for there stood Lucy by the window, looking out after the band of adventurers.

"Why, Lucy Day!" said she, "what have you been cryin' about? Why, you are as pale as a sheet, child! There ain't no danger in moose-huntin', if a man understands himself, I tell *you*. Come, come; cheer up."

Lucy tried to smile, but in vain; her eyes filled, and her aunt heard the noise of crumpled paper, as she withdrew her hand from her bosom, but asked no questions.

"There, there, go to your flax-wheel, and see if we can't have some o' the old-fashioned music we used to be so fond of; and I want you should do your best now."

"Yes, aunty," and the next minute she was seated by the little miniature spinning-wheel, rattling away, and tilting her foot and running the thread from the distaff upon the spool, as if it were the only business on earth worth living for.

But, after a short silence, during which only the low breathing of Lucy Day, and the whirr of the spinning-wheel, could be heard, there was a great noise outside, as if a large school had been suddenly turned loose, with shouting and screaming from the nearest highway.

"Massy me!" cried aunt Sarah, "if there ain't that Jerushy Jane, with all the rest o' the young-ones, cross-pled up on to the sled, with the hay and oats, and salt fish, and camp-kittles and boards; they'll get run away with, as sure as they're alive!" And throwing up the window, she screamed to them to "get off, right away!" After another scream or two in reply, they obeyed, and the driver started his colts upon a gallop, to overtake the last of the four sleighs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAMP.

UNCLE Jeremiah was a magistrate, and it had been voted in town meeting, that whenever he deemed it necessary, he should call out the *poose companies*, with their teams to break the roads. But now the crust was strong enough to bear the heaviest ox team with a loaded sled, and even the horses hardly ever broke through upon a gallop.

"Rather agin us, my lads—that's a fact," said he, after they were well under way.

"Agin us, father! how so?" said Luther; "what's to hinder our troatin' and gallopin' anywhere we like, till we get into the woods?"

"To be sure! And what's to hinder the moose from rattlin' away for twenty miles on a stretch, without slumping? And, after we get into the woods, we can't do over twelve miles a day.

Fact is, we must wait for a thaw, or we shall have to camp out for a week or two—shan't we, Iry?"

The schoolmaster nodded, and his companion, the elder of the two Fraziers, looked up suddenly, with a startled expression:

"Ira!—Ira!"—he muttered—"your name ain't Burleigh, is it, sir?"

"That's my name, sir—Ira Burleigh."

"Why, then, you're the chap that was goin' to be married about this time, hey?"

The schoolmaster grew very red in the face, then pale, and was just about answering, when the other broke out into a loud, boisterous laugh, and shouted for his brother, who was in the second sleigh, to push up alongside.

"This way, Joe, this way," said he; "come up on my side of the sleigh, will you?" laying his heavy arm across the reins, greatly to the surprise of Uncle Jeremiah, so as to check the horses. "Beg your pardon, Gin'ral, but I wan' to tell Joe somethin'."

The sleigh drew up alongside. Joe leaned over toward his brother, and asked, "What's to pay now, Bob?"

"What d'ye think o' the weddin', Joe, hey?"

"Oh, bother! don't talk to me about the weddin' here. I wish I'd never heerd it mentioned; and if I hadn't promised Ned to see him through with the confounded scrape, I might as if I wouldn't clear out now. But what the plague are you making faces at, Bob?"

"At you, Joe—and if you only knew enough to hold your yop when you're among strangers, it would be a good deal better for both. Easy, Gin'ral! easy for a minute! and then you may let go like blazes. What did brother Ned say to you, when he told you what was in the wind away off here, and what did we promise him?"

"What did we promise him? Why, to hold our tongues, and look as if butter wouldn't melt in our mouths, and haven't we kept our promise? If you haven't, I have."

"Hold in, will you? Do you see this chap here at my elbow?"

"See him, to be sure I do."

"Ever see him afore?"

"Never."

"Should you know him agin, if he should ever happen to cross your track?"

"Wal, rayther think I should. Who is it?"

"That is Mr. Iry Burleigh, Joe."

"Thunder! You don't say so? When did you see that out?"

"Not five minutes ago."

"The great moose hunter, hey?"

Uncle Jeremiah started, pricked up his ears, and stared at the speaker.

"Yes, Joe, and a match for the Brigadier himself I'm told, if the truth was known."

"But I say, brother," said Joe, lowering his voice, and leaning half out of the sleigh, trying to get a look at the schoolmaster's face under the wolf-cap, and then whistling, with such a comical expression, that even the Brigadier was obliged to smile.

"Come, come, boys, enough o' this nonsense," said he, shaking the reins, and starting the horses into a free gallop, just as Joe sung out, "Hurrah for the bridegroom! Three cheers for the bridegroom!"

The schoolmaster turned suddenly on the speaker, and, grasping his gun by the breech, seemed on the point of answering somewhat rashly; but after a brief inward struggle, he drew the wolf-cap down over his face with a jerk, and fetched the stranger a slap on his thigh, with a suddenness and strength which made him jump. The Brigadier grew uneasy, and there was a dead silence, while the horses, all white with hoar-frost and smoking, were breathed alongside of a hill. He and the schoolmaster interchanged glances, and both were evidently laboring with this new revelation of character, trying, each for himself, to reconcile the strange behavior of these two young men, their seriousness and their uncommon silence at first, with their talkativeness and boisterous familiarity now.

There was little or no wind; but the cold was enough to split rocks—and really did split some of the largest rock maples which the hunters passed on their way, standing out in the open pasture, and literally *on top* for the preparation of sugar.

The weather had been favorable for the last month, freezing hard every night, and thawing almost every day, till within the last forty-eight hours; people had come all along from "away down East," as well as from the borders of New Hampshire and Vermont, to the sugar harvest. But now the troughs were frozen up, or filled with snow, the fires all out, the kettles and the trees snapping, and, in some cases, actually splitting with intense cold.

After stopping to water their horses, and give them a mouthful of oats, under the lee of what had once been a shed for the horses, they fell into conversation.

It was now drawing near twelve, the dinner hour at home; and, after looking at his bell's eye, the Brigadier blew a blast upon the conch-shell which he had brought with him for the purpose. He then lugged out from underneath a pile of sheepskins and coverlets a number of baskets and boxes, crammed full of doughnuts, baked beans, fat pork, apple turnovers, and baked fish—all unfrozen and in the best possible condition. Then followed.

At first, if they had not opened at break of day, like the

hunters in Chevy Chase, nor driven the deer with hound and horn, till their clamor filled the sky, they certainly rang up the whole neighborhood, as they skurried by. Many a straggler was seen tailing on, before the hunters reached the end of their journey; though but here and there one held out above an hour; while most of them, having satisfied their curiosity by seeing the double sleigh of the Brigadier ahead, took it for granted that if he wanted more company, he would let them know, and turned off into the woods; while others, who had been disturbed early, and on looking out of the windows could see nothing to explain the reason, declared upon oath, or were ready to do so, before a magistrate, as they afterward acknowledged, that they had heard the same uproar all night long at intervals, with the baying of dogs and the sound of horns; and then they shook their heads portentously, and whispered that all the noises came from the direction of the haunted house, and were just of a piece with what they'd all "learned of," long before it came into the hands of Uncle Jeremiah. Then they wondered if he'd never heard about the Blaisdells, nor about the phantoms that were seen there in broad daylight going to a funeral, nor about the affidavits published by the Rev. Abraham Cummings and others; and whether, if he had been told before it was too late, he would have taken the house and farm for a gift. On the whole, perhaps, if some of the nearest neighbors had met with the cavalcade at midnight, rushing by like the wild huntsman and his dark followers upon the Hariz mountains, they would not have been much more frightened than they were at first, when, on looking out of their windows, they saw nothing to explain the noises they had been hearing through the night; and when, after holding a consultation, they all agreed that they came from the direction of the haunted house, of yore the Blaisdell house, though now belonging to the Brigadier.

No wonder; for about sunrise, or soon after, the still air of that large, open, quiet neighborhood, through which the cavalcade were scouring, oftentimes at a gallop, ring far and wide with conch-shells and sleigh-bells, with stage-horns and loud voices, with clamorous laughter, the cracking of whips and the yelping of unmanageable curs, chasing their shadows over the smooth, level crust and sparkling imitations, paying no heed to voice or whip, nor even to the low, growling under-base of old Watch till, in their furious gambolling, they would come a little too near the sleigh he was in, and get before the horses, or snap at their heels; when, thrusting his bare head from under the bearskins and blankets, he would break out with a sudden roar, and set them scampering in all directions, head over heels, to the unspeakable satisfaction of his dear old master, who would throw himself back on the seat, and roll about, like the Santissima Trinidad in the Bay of Biscay, and laugh so it would have done you good to hear him, till the distant woods

ring again, and sky, earth and air answered with a multitudinous echo.

But, toward nightfall, the noises died away; the puppies were called in and permitted to cuddle up in the sleighs. There were signs of a thaw, to which Uncle Jeremiah called the attention of the schoolmaster, and pointed to the smoking houses for proof.

"If it should only be soft enough by to-morrow afternoon," said Burleigh, "so that we may be able to go on snow-shoes leaving our horses in camp—"

"Yes, Iry—that's our chance. I see you understand the business, though I'd no idee you'd ever seen a moose in your life, till this mornin'. If we come across that feller's track, we shall soon find the yard; then we shall be sure of the cow and the young ones, if the bull is obliged to *plow*."

"But we needn't be in a hurry, sir. There's time enough yet for camping, and it will take us another day to find the track."

Here one of the dogs yelped, and was immediately answered by another, and another, till they were all in full cry under the blankets, struggling to get loose.

"Be quiet! We shall have to put a stop to this; it may cost us a hundred miles round the lake, if the moose get frightened. There they go again! These puppies *must* be made to behave"—glancing at the two strangers—"they are altogether too noisy, and too playful, and if they are not mazzled, mischief may come of it."

"Why, how your eyes flash, Master Burleigh!" said Luther, who had been silent for the last half-hour.

"Ay, ay; and all the young fry must learn to keep a still tongue in their heads, and go softly," said Uncle Jeremiah; "and they'd better begin at once, *leg*, Iry?"

"Certainly; for you know the snapping of a twig will often set off a bull moose for twenty or thirty miles upon a stretch; and his hearing is so fine, the Indians, who call him 'Aptapton,' believe he can hear the grass grow and the stars move."

"A real Sabbath-day's journey, Iry, *leg*?"

"More than that, sir, after we once get into the woods, unless we are able to use our snow-shoes: but the wind has changed, I see, and the weather is moderating."

"Just what we wanted, Iry!" said the Brigadier. After rubbing his hands awhile and thrashing his arms about, and congratulating the schoolmaster upon the change of weather, he began questioning Frazier—Bob Frazier—about the landmarks, as he had often done before, while on their way.

Frazier looked about for awhile, before and behind, and away off among the hills; then glanced up at the sky; then muttered something about "due north," and then *scram*.

utterly lost and bewildered. The Brigadier watched him with a look of alarm and anxiety and the schoolmaster with something portentous in his quiet, clear eye, and with uncommon seriousness of manner.

"I declare to you, Gin'ral," said Frazier, "I'm all at sea! We took to the woods, after we had traveled perhaps twenty or twenty-five miles, and we came across the track I mentioned before we had gone above three or four miles; but I'll see whis; brother Joe says. *I say! Joe!*"

"Wal, Bob, what's to pay now?"

"Push up alongside, will you?"

The whip cracked, the horse leaped forward, and the next moment Joe was forging ahead almost within reach of his brother.

"Ain't you a leetle out in your reckonin', Joe?"

"What reckonin', Bob?"

"Wal, Joe, if you ain't, I am. Do you know where we are?"

"Not I! nor have I known for the last twenty miles."

"Botheration! Why didn't you say so?"

"Why should I say any thing? I thought you knew; and as you led off, I had nothin' to do but follow."

"You are perfectly serious, Joe?"

"Perfectly."

"Mean what you say?"

"Yes, Bob."

"Honor bright, now—I saw you wink at the schoolmaster."

"Wal, maybe you did; for the glitterin' crust dazzles me, and the fine snow drives into my eyes, and I'm all frozen up, as you see by my breath on this buffalo."

"Oh nonsense; do be serious for once in your life, will ye?"

"Suppose you try the Brigadier."

The Brigadier shook his head. "I'm not well acquainted jest about here," said he. "Something like a dozen miles back I saw an old path we used for a log-in' camp five or six years ago; but, jest here, I'm all out o' my latitude."

"What are we to do then?" said Joe.

"What are we to do! Why, pull up, straight, and hold a consultation. We can't stop here, old Gentle—I beg your pardon, sir—can we? And we don't want to go back, I suppose if we can help it."

"Aye, aye!" said the Brigadier, with a most determined emphasis. "I say, boys—halt! to there! Come up alongside, will ye we're goin' to hold a council o' war!"

They drew up abreast in silence, and waited for the Jeremiah to open the meeting.

"Wal, my kels, the first question in order is, where the plague air we?"

No answer. The question was repeated with uncommon

seriousness, and Uncle Jeremiah began to fidget with a look of growing impatience.

"Better ask Mr. Burleigh," said Joe, with a jerk of the head in that direction.

The Brigadier turned to the schoolmaster "Well, Iry," said he, "what have you to say? Have you any idea where we are?"

Yes, clearly. I am well acquainted in this neighborhood. We are about five and twenty miles from the nearest part of Moosehead Lake."

"Posserble?"

"And if we are wise, we shall go to camp in the nearest woods, while it is light enough to find water; and not lose another minute."

"Come, come, boys, be stirrin', will ye? The nearest woods, you say, Iry?"

"Yes, just off there," pointing; "and I am greatly mistaken, if I cannot lead you to-morrow morning early—and perhaps before daylight, if we camp in good season—to that maple growth, where these two strangers found the trees barked and peeled, and the snow trampled as they told you."

"You don't say so, Iry Burleigh! Give us your hand!"

"Hurrah for our side!" shouted Luther.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" echoed Peletiah, and the teamster, each trying to outshout the other.

Straightway there was heard a low, snappish, half-smothered yelping from the other sleighs—a sharp cry or two, as if Joe were pinching the puppy's tail—and then, a low, ponderous, threatening growl from the mastiff.

"Be quiet, sir!" said the Brigadier; "be quiet, all of you; and into the nearest woods it is; hurrah!" and away they all scampered, as if each meant to be first, the sleigh-bells jingling, the fine snow whirling up in a cloud about the horses, and the steel runners ringing like musical glasses; and just as the great red sun rolled earthward—a giant traveling in his strength and carrying his pavilion with him, they entered the dark pine forest. Making their way over all sorts of hindrances and impediments for half an hour, at the risk of spoiling their horses, and pitching themselves into unfathomable depths of snow, they came to a spot which made Uncle Jeremiah clap his hands for joy.

"Give me you yet, Iry Burleigh!" said he, as they hitched their horses, and all turned to, with their axes, to clear away the undergrowth.

This being finished, a part of the company began trampling the snow round the borders and clearing it away under a large tree they had left near the center, while others went after flat cedar branches and spruce boughs, for beds and floor coverings. Peletiah opened the path to a boiling spring, under the direction

of Barleigh, where the snow had melted away, and the water went rattling and smoking like a mill-race.

Long before it was too dark to see, they had bent down a score of young pines, and laid hemlock bark and rough boards and spruce boughs from the large central tree to the circumference, and covered the whole and the bare earth below with sprays of *arbor vitæ*, hemlock and spruce, and piled up their fragrant beds of cedar two feet high, all round the inner circumference of the lodge, so that they could all lie with their feet to the fire. Then they dug a hole in the center, and opened a draft into the open air by a drain which served for a chimney, to carry off the smoke. This done the "cattle" were watered and were given four quarts of Indian meal apiece; then they also were bedded down with spruce boughs and a litter of clean straw—being "merciful to their beasts" and willing to please the Brigadier.

The horses then being housed and the sleighs under cover, or turned upside down and set leaning against the trees, the hunters made a roaring fire, built round with pieces of rock. The tea-kettle soon was simmering, and some rough benches were extemporized for what is called the deacon's seat, nearest the fire; and a table, with a plenty of tin dishes, provisions, and a supply of bayberry candles, was soon ready.

Most of the party knew what "roughing it" means; for all had been hunters, or teamsters, or lumbermen, and were somewhat familiar with camp lodges "in some vast wilderness."

Supper being over they sawed off blocks of wood for seats, or pulled out the ends of the benches, and the sacks of meal, and got round the fire; but after a little brief questioning and two or three tough stories, they relapsed into a dead silence, one after another.

The Brigadier sat with his eyes shut, and both hands clasping his right leg, with the foot lifted from the ground.

"How do you feel, father? Stiff at all, hey?" said Luther.

"Not a bit, Luther."

"And your rheumatiz, and your crotches?"

"Left 'em both at home, Luther," and the conversation dropped.

Luther next turned to the schoolmaster, who sat in the shadow and seemed studying the countenance of the elder Frazier, as if trying to puzzle out some lost recollection, or a great mystery; while the younger, who had thrown himself back on a pile of bearskins, with his heels in the air, seemed to be scraping acquaintance with old Watch, now by pulling his ears, and now by trying to make him give paw.

"We must be up bright and early to-morrow boys—long before daylight," said the Brigadier.

"Yes, and be prepared for serious work," added Barleigh.

"It's no child's play to encounter a bull moose in the deep snow at this season of the year, with antlers just ready to drop off, and the cow and the calves with him."

"But you wouldn't call it dangerous, Master Burleigh, would you though?" said Luther, with a look of deep interest.

"Ask your father."

"Wal, father—what do you say?"

"What do I say? Wal, I say that I would rather have a tussle with a catamount or a bear, single-handed, than with a bull moose, while his horns are tender, and the cows and calves are under his charge, as they air now."

"Unarmed, Gin'ral, d'ye mean?" queried the elder Frazier.

"Armed with a hunting-knife only, I mean; for at arm's length, or close hug, my gun wouldn't be good for much."

"Didn't you have what you call a tussle once when father was with you—ever so many years ago?" continued Frazier.

"Yes, half a hundred years or so; for he was a famous hunter, and afraid of nothin't walks the airth. Many's the hunt we have had together from Quebec to Labrador."

"What's the best hunting season, sir?" asked Joe.

"Wal, I hardly know. Sometimes March, and sometimes September. In September it's rather more resky on the whole; for that's the ruttin' season, and they run bellowin' through the woods so that you can hear 'em three miles off in a still day along the waters of Moosehead Lake. If two bulls then meet they go at one another head fust, and interlock their big horns, and rear and plunge and strike with their fore-feet, and tear up the turf and the soil sometimes jest as cattle do in a barn-yard, and never part till one or both are seriously damaged or killed outright. In March, however, I like to hunt 'em best:—what do you say, Ivy?"

The schoolmaster nodded.

"And why, pray? I should like to understand something more of this matter before I get into a scrape, with my inexperience," continued Frazier.

"Because in March the sun melts the snow," said the schoolmaster, evidently gratified by his deferential manner, "and the crust forms at night, and the moose can not travel far."

"Indeed! why not?"

"Because he lifts his feet perpendicularly, and the crust cuts the skin off his shanks."

"Oh my!" exclaimed Luther.

"Goodness me! you don't say so?" added Peletiah.

"When the snow is soft, they are safe," continued the schoolmaster, "for they can not settle very far with their wide hoofs, and are able to plow."

"Plow! What's that, hey?"

"When they sink in deep snow and push along without lifting their feet clear, that's called plowing."

"And that's the time for snow-shoes, hey?"

"Yes; but following a great big bull moose on snow-shoes, let me tell you, is no laughing matter. He has all the advantage with his great long trot; and, unless you can worry him out with your little dogs, you may have to follow him for days, and sometimes all day long without stopping."

"Little dogs! Why not have large dogs?"

"Because the little dogs keep teasing him and snapping at his heels, and when he turns upon them, as they are not heavy enough to break through the crust, they are able to get out of the way, and that gives the hunter time to come up and breathe; but the large dogs that try to fasten on his throat, or to pin him by that hanging lip of his, the *moufion*, get trampled to death in a jiffy, and he pushes on without stopping."

"And that upper lip—that *moufion*—what a scrumptious eat-in' it is to be sure!" exclaimed the Brigadier.

"One of the greatest delicacies in the world, sir," said Burleigh, "when served up like calves' head."

"Hardly equal to the marrow taken warm from the shank, and eaten like butter, though," added Uncle Jeremiah, smacking his lips.

"Or the steak itself!" added Joe; "or the part old hunters eat raw? or the tongue?"

"*Raw!* Do they ever eat moose-meat raw?" said Luther, making a dreadful face at Burleigh.

The Brigadier burst forth into a loud, boisterous laugh, at the expression of poor Luther's countenance.

"Oh, ho! my boy, you've got something to learn, I see, afore you are allowed to help yourself to moose!" And then he laughed again, more heartily than ever, at the look of loathing with which the young man listened to Burleigh, as he described the part so eaten raw. "It is the last entrail," said he, "covered with lumps of suet; and ranks with bird's nest, and canvas-backs, and buffalo hunch, and soft crabs, among epicures."

"But, how big a moose did you ever see, father; and how large were his horns, or antlers I think you called them, Master Burleigh? You haven't answered that question, father?"

"No—because you didn't give me a chance, afore you cut in with another."

"Wal, then, how big should you say?"

"Over twelve hundred weight sometimes, though eight or nine hundred would be a fair average."

"And how high, father? and what is he like? I want you to tell me all about him, afore I go to sleep."

"We ought to be asleep now, all of us, if we mean to be up bright and airy, two hours afore day; but you answer him, Iry. He'll remember what you tell him; and I'll turn in."

"Well, sir, he is a great, lubberly, uncouth creature, of the deer family, with a most enormous head."

"Like the head of a jackass, hey?" said Uncle Jeremiah.

"Shouldn't you say so, Iry?"

"Certainly; but still more like the river-horse—the behemoth, or hippopotamus of the Nile."

How the company did stare! And the Brigadier, who had begun to settle down into his pile of bearskins and blankets, raised himself up on one elbow, and listened as if the whole story were new even to him.

"With long ears," continued the schoolmaster, "a short neck and short tail, not an inch long; and a stiff, coarse mane; palated horns five feet long, and sometimes more, spreading from three to four feet, with palms a foot wide, and weighing from sixty to seventy pounds; hair long and coarse on the neck and shoulders, with a finer and thicker covering underneath."

"And what color is he?"

"Reddish brown in the winter and while young; but with age, color changes to black, so that he is called by some naturalists the American black elk."

"You don't say so?"

"I have measured one from nose to tail, and found him six feet eleven inches and another seven feet two inches; from shoulder to hoof they were four feet six inches and five feet."

"Equal to a horse fifteen hands high, Luther," added the Brigadier.

"Only the males have horns; and these are shed every year; only knobs the first year, but in the fourth, "palms" come out, and at the end of the fifth year, they get their full growth."

"Any thing more, please?" inquired Joe.

"Nothing that I now remember, except, perhaps, that pendulous gland, like a bunch of hog's bristles, ten or twelve inches long, hanging from his throat."

"A what! Master Burleigh?" said Luther.

"A pendulous gland, sir."

"Possible!" said Luther, perfectly satisfied with the explanation.

"Hanging from the throat, Luther," said the good old man, raising himself; "an' jest above where you must aim, if he should come at you head first."

"Otherwise, you must let fly just back of the shoulder," added Burleigh, "if he doesn't offer his breast, which he always will do if you are cool and patient."

"And if you ain't as cool as a cucumber, and well prepared, my boy, let me tell you now, afore we take the field, that the first time you hear the bellowin' o' the bull moose, and the thunderin' noise o' the low branches and saplin's, as he goes tearin' his way through the undergrowth, with his head thrown back, and pluggin' and clatterin' over the fallen trees, you'll be very like'y to wish yourself to Lum."

"I wish it now, father; an' if you've no objection, I'll stay by the stuff to-morrow, and let you and the other old hunters go after moose."

"Agreed; but you must have somebody with you, and build us a chimney outside—Paltiah'll show you how, and get up a load of hemlock-bark for the ruff, and lay pine boughs over the whole, ugin we git back; and neighbor Smith will help you."

"Father."

"Wal?"

"I have made up my mind, father. I shall stay by the stuff."

"Or *hide* among the stuff, like Saul, the son of Kish," said his father, laughing heartily. The others followed suit, but, faithful to their promise, they all tumbled into their beds. All were sound asleep, and most of them snoring, within five minutes, at furthest.

CHAPTER V.

THE HUNT.

Two hours before daybreak, our hunters were all up and astir. Breakfast being over, the Brigadier called another council of war, and, after talking over the business of the day, and making all proper arrangements, he turned to the schoolmaster and said, "Now, Iry, for the laws of the hunt."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the schoolmaster; "it is for you to lay down the law, as the elder an' better man."

"An older, not a better man, Iry."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Joe. "In the original it stands 'an older, not a better soldier,' sir," and then he added, in a whisper to Burleigh, "think of a Methodist and a Quaker borrowing the language of a play!"

The schoolmaster couldn't help smiling. It was the first and last time, however, for many a long day, and was remembered for years by the elder Frazier, and often mentioned by the Brigadier with wet lashes, and a trembling voice.

"Come, come, Iry; we've not a minute to lose. Tell 'em what is expected of 'em, without mincin' the matter, will ye?"

"With all my heart, sir. Anybody got a rifle here?"

After a brief inquiry, somebody answered: "No, sir; all smooth-bores."

"Double-barreled?"

"No, not one."

"Plenty of bullets and buck-shot, hey?"

All answered, "Yes."

"Wal, we must understand this part of the business before

we take another step. Let all who reckon themselves a good shot with a ball step forward."

The Brigadier and Joe, grasping their pieces, ranged up alongside of the schoolmaster.

"And how are you for a ball, Iry?" said the former.

"Pretty fair; I never use buck-shot."

"Possible?"

"Now, mind: we are the reserve. We must be careful to leave no buck-shot in our own pieces, for we may have to fire suddenly, and the buck-shot may scatter so as to spoil our aim."

"Yes, Iry, and I may do our friends a mischief when it may be a matter of life or death," added the Brigadier.

"Even so, sir. The rest of you will keep loaded with balls and buck-shot."

"That's for you, brother Bob, and for you, Peltiah," said Joe, "and for that young walrus who promises to stay by the stuff, hey?"

"Be quiet, will you?" said his brother. "Go on, if you please, Mr. Barleigh. What next?"

"Next, we are to agree never to shoot, after separating, except at a mouse, no matter what we see, nor how great the temptation. What say ye, my lads?"

"Agreed! agreed! agreed!"

"And then, in the next place, after we strike the path, we must push on without noise or talking; and, after we get near the yard, there must be no whispering—not a word for your lives, if you happen to see each other—not even a motion of the hand, nor a silent signal, without the greatest possible caution, for the bull feeds high, and when the cow and calves are with him, he is always on the watch, and while stripping the bark off, or browsing, will stop and listen every few minutes, with his head away up in the air, so that he can hear and see whatever's in the wind. His hearing is wonderfully acute. I have known the creaking of a snow-shoe to set him off on a long trot for miles upon miles."

"And I," said the Brigadier, "once lost a gray mouse, the biggest I have ever seen, by the falling of a pinch of snow from a spray of moss-wood, just as I was stooping up for a shot, and he got within range, with my finger on the trigger."

"And then, too, you must bear in mind," continued Barleigh, "that he always 'grazes' on the south side of the mountain-range; and so you must always work up to downward."

"To downward? What the place's that, Iry?" asked Luther.

"With the wind in your face, my boy," said the Brigadier.

"Otherwise," continued the schoolmaster, "you haven't a chance. Go with the wind, I care not how cautiously, and he'll meet you long before you see him."

"Any thing more?"

"Only this: after we separate, some of you may get lost in the woods. Therefore I advise you to take your bearings now, by the moss on the trees and the *slant*; and by the north star when you can see it, as we do now. Make for the camp; and the first one that finds a track, or a trail, or any trees stripped of their bark down to the snow, but no further, must lose no time in communicating with the rest."

"How—by firing a gun?" said Bob Frazier.

"Not for your life, sir! Once in the neighborhood of the moose, the track will show at once, not only in what direction we are to go, but, almost always, how far. The grating of our shoes upon the hard crust, a slight cough—the slightest in the world—or stepping upon a dry twig, or the fall of an icicle—any of these may start him off, nobody knows how far, with his whole family."

"With his whole family, sir! What are we to understand by that?"

"Almost always—always, indeed, after the first dropping—you will find two calves with the mother; and sometimes, before the rutting season, two or three families are together in one yard."

"All ready, sir?" inquired the elder Frazier.

"All ready? Yes. No, no—stop! One thing I had forgotten. Some of you have had little or no experience, I find. Now, when you hear the stripping of the bark and the tearing of the branches, and the snorting, and the rattling of the hooves on the hard crust, you may get flurried, and fire at the noise, without seeing the moose, and the first thing you'll know, if you haven't shot one of your companions, the creature will be after you, full spring, and you may have to run for your life."

"It must be rather dangerous, hunting apart, as you say, and having no communication till you are upon the creature," added the younger Frazier.

"Very dangerous, if you do not observe the directions. Young sportsmen are constantly meeting with mishaps, and sometimes bring down one of their company in their hurry and trepidation, if they happen to see any stirring of the undergrowth, or if they chance to hear a suspicious noise in the bushes about them."

"But just look at the Gin'ral!" said Joe: "see how far he's got ahead of us!"

"And now he's making signs; he sees something. There must be something away over there in sight," cried Barleigh, "for he wants us all to hurry up, you see."

"But I understood we were to make no signs, Master Barleigh. How's that?"

"No signs after you're on the track, or have got near the yard, or have entered the woods; but, here in the open pasture, while we are all in sight, signs won't make the matter worse

Hallo!—what's in the wind now? He is taking to the woods, faster than we can follow him. He must have found something, and, as he happens to be in the very direction we want to go, we must try to head him off. Ah, as I live, there comes Luther! I say, *Luther!*"

"Wal; what's to pay now?"

"You go back to camp, will ye, and take Watch with you. We shan't need either of you for one while."

"But s'pose he won't go? He sees father, and it's about as much as I can do now to hold him in on this slippery crust."

"Get a rope, then, Peltiah, and tie him, for, if he should escape, he would be likely to play the very mischief with our sport. All the puppies are tied, you see, and not one of the whole has uttered so much as a yelp; and, what's more, you'll want Watch to guard the camp."

Luther started off, dragging old Watch after him over the slippery crust, the dog being more than a match for him on the smooth places.

"Heave ahead, my boys!" exclaimed Joe, dashing forward in the direction of the woods.

"Ay, ay, heave ahead 'tis," answered somebody in the rear, "an' devil take the hindmost!"

All turned at the sound of the strange voice. The two brothers looked frightened at first, and then stood still with astonishment.

"Why, it's Ned!" "Man alive, so 'tis!" they both exclaimed. "Why, how are you, Ned?" "How are you Bob?" "And how are you, Joe?" shouted the stranger, a tall, handsome fellow, in a strange garb—half military and half hunter.

"Where from, Ned?"

"No matter, now; push ahead—move on, will you, or that old Nimrod yonder'll have all the fun to himself;" and away he started, making the strangest flourishes with his arms, and the most astonishing progress with his long, three-foot-and-a-half snow-shoes. He was evidently fast gaining upon the Brigadier, who, on hearing the noise behind him, slackened his pace, and waited for the stranger to come up.

"Hullo, Edward; is that you?" he exclaimed, as he drew up alongside; "where from?"

"From away down East," and the young man pointed away off in the direction of the highlands they had left the day before.

"*Poor little!* See the old woman and the children?"

"Yes."

"And how did you leave 'em all?"

"Chipper as you please—all but Lucy."

"And what about Lucy?"

"Rather down in the mouth—what you'd call meachin."

"Oh, wal, I don't much wonder. She was to have been married to-day—this very day, Ned!"

"Well, well, never mind that now; wait till we're by ourselves, and then I have got something to tell you."

"Keep alongside o' me, my boy, and I'll show you something within five minutes that'll make your hair rise; do you see, pointing to the wood—"no, no, not there! farther along, where there seems to be a sort of openin' between the trees."

"Ay, ay; I see now. What is it?"

"Hush, will you."

"And you are one of those men we read of in the Bible, hey, who, at three score and ten, have outlived their usefulness and their strength?" continued the young stranger, laboring with all his might to keep up with the Brigadier, as the old gentleman forged ahead with the sweep of a giant. "I do not see that a grasshopper would be much of a burthen to you yet!"

"No indeed, Ned. On the contrary, all my burthens are grasshoppers," said the patriarch, with a smile.

"Nor do I find the golden bowl broken, or the silver cord loosened a bit, since I saw you last, when, if I am not greatly mistaken, you were not only past three score and ten, but nigh onto 'four score and upwards,' like Lear, and like Lear, too, in the way of being 'mightily abused.'"

"Come, come, Ned; you'll never find out my age in that way."

"Well, never mind. All I have to say now is that I believe in the Wandering Jew."

Having reached the opening, the old man halted, and taking off his hat, waved it for the party to hurry up.

"Do you see that, boys?" he said, after all were near enough to hear what he said, though he spoke in a low voice; "do you see that, hey?" pointing to a strange appearance in the snow—a sort of undulation along the surface.

"Ah!" exclaimed Burleigh, who was the first to understand his meaning, "you are right, sir! There's a track under the snow—I can see through it, and trace the path almost as clearly as if the snow had not covered it up."

"Sarvent, sir," said the Brigadier, lifting his broad shoulders with a hearty chuckle; "there wasn't much of a fall here, you see; and out in the open paster and along the side o' the hill, where the wind has a free sweep, it never stays long, 'thout there's rain."

"And what's more to the purpose," continued Burleigh, "I happen to know that this very path leads to a spring that never freezes, even in the coldest weather."

"Ah ha!" exclaimed the Brigadier, rubbing his hands with great energy, and looking round upon the others just in time to see the schoolmaster break away and set off by himself at full speed, and, entering the first opening, instantly disappear.

"Who is that fine fellow?" said the stranger, pointing athwart the group who stood leaning on their guns and listening, each with a puppy at his heels, waiting to be let loose.

"Which, Ned?"

"That slender chap, with the long hair! He goes over the crust like a panther, and looks as if he would outrun a grayhound."

"That! Why, don't you know him, brother?"

"No indeed, not I!"

"Well—that's the schoolmaster."

"Not Mr. Burleigh, Bob!"

"Yes, Ned—Ira Burleigh, the schoolmaster."

"Thunder and lightning! you don't say so!"

At this moment Burleigh appeared in the opening, with his fore-finger lifted, and crouching under the shadow of a prodigious hemlock.

They all hurried up, and, looking away off where he pointed saw a sapling bent over what seemed to be a narrow but well trodden pathway, so lightly covered with snow that the tracks were plainly to be seen through it here and there.

The Brigadier was well-nigh beside himself, while the puppies began twitching and pulling upon the leashes, and snuffing at the tracks.

Burleigh, holding up his fore-finger, listened. "We can not be much out of the way," said he, "for there lies, off there, the sugar maple growth you want to find, not five miles from here. There you see a trap set for the moose, though nothing has been this way since the great storm—"

"A trap, sir! what d'ye mean by a trap?" asked the stranger.

Burleigh pointed to the sapling, and to a hempen slip-noose hanging low down across the path, where, upon farther examination, carried on in a dead silence, they found another sapling bent to another tree and set with a sort of trigger.

"What's the meaning of this arrangement, if you please, sir?" continued the new-comer, eyeing the schoolmaster with a singular expression, which was long remembered by those who saw it. "Please explain, sir."

"With all my heart. The moose, in traveling on the way to water, runs his head through the hanging noose you see there; and, after a few moments, disengages the trigger, when the tree springs up and lifts him off his legs."

"And the poor fellow dies of strangulation, hey?" said Bob Frazier.

"Cruel! shameful!" exclaimed Joe and Ned, followed by the Brigadier, who said, snapping his eyes: "Con-sarn it all! if I could bear to see one of these brave brutes throttled in that way."

"Let's cut it down," said Joe, "and allow the sapling to right itself."

"Not for your life!" said Burleigh. "It's the law of the hunt in these parts, never to intermeddle with another man's work. This very trap may have been set by a Penobscot, and who to him that dares to touch the noose, or set the sapling free!"

"Pshaw! Penobscots be hanged!" added the stranger, and

whipping out a large hunting-knife, he cut the cord with a single blow, before anybody could interfere, and the tree sprung back to its place.

The Brigadier laid his hand upon his arm, and looked very serious.

"Young man," said he, "you have done a very foolish thing—a very rash thing, and the best advice I can give you, is to bend down that sapling as you found it, and set the trap anew, without losing a moment. Shall I do it for you?"

"Fire and fury! No!—What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid! pooh! Master Burleigh, will you be so obligin' as to fix that noose?"

Burleigh looked at the stranger. Ned turned pale and muttered through his shut teeth something which was not well understood at the time, and then said: "Leave the matter with me, sir. You push ahead, all of you—and leave me to repair damages, and take the consequences."

There was a concentrated bitterness—a sort of angry contemptuousness in the look and tone, which troubled the Brigadier; but, beckoning to the others to follow, he pushed on ahead, leaving the stranger to do the work for himself, and follow at his leisure.

On their way, they came upon what puzzled the young hunters, even more than the moose-trap. They saw grouse, partridges, and hares, and in one case the whole broadside of a caribou hung high up on the trees, though within reach, and frozen hard.

"Well, we needn't want for grub, you see, even if we shouldn't find the moose," said Joe, reaching up to take down a pair of partridges that hung lower than the rest.

"No, no—honor bright!" said the Brigadier. "All this game is sacred. Hunters leave it sometimes all winter, and I have had venison brought to my house for sale which had been frozen for weeks, and perhaps for months, in this way."

"Well! I must say that you moose-hunters are a strange set o' fellows; and I should like to see more of you," said Bob Frazier, "but I don't like the moose-trap."

"Nor I neither, sir," said the Brigadier; "but the trap we see jess now, was nothin' to another kind the Passamaquoddyes and some others use. They take a sort of a—what the school-master would call a horizontal branch, and fasten a heavy log to it with a slip-noose, and the poor beast does a little sooner, to be sure, but only arter a dreadful kickin' and bellowin'. But we are in the woods now, though miles away from the yard, which I'm a thinkin' may be on the southerly side of that range you see away off yonder. What say you, Iry?"

The schoolmaster nodded, and then said something about the maple growth being in another direction.

"Yea," continued the Brigadier, "there's no knowin' how

soon we may light on a track, or come across a well-trodden path, and we'd better have no more talk for the present."

"Let us push ahead in perfect silence—following our leader, till he stops and signifies, by pointing, which way we are to go. Then, it's every man for himself," said Barleigh, "only it would be well for each of the party to keep at least one of the others in view, as he may want help at a critical moment. I have known our best hunters to fail in the first shot. If the creature is only wounded, he may charge upon you, or give you a run for his life, after you think he is just ready to drop; and never allow you to get near him again." Saying this he pushed ahead, once more, as if he saw something.

All stopped. Barleigh pointed to the nearest wood, and waved his hand for them to get under cover. As it was now near noon, they were hungry as tigers, with nothing but raw pork and Milled crackers to eat, and a tin cup of ice-water, got from a running brook, with a dash of old Jamaica, for drink.

Silently and slowly they crept along to the place where they had last seen Barleigh; but he had vanished. They looked all about, and would have called him to lunch, under the huge hemlocks, where they had gathered, but were prevented by a look from the Brigadier.

Not a word was spoken, till they heard a sound which came and went with the rising wind, like the noise of an ax, and then like that made by a carpenter, in shoving his fore-plane over a spruce board.

The Brigadier stopped out to listen; and then, without saying a word, started off in the direction of the sound—followed by the two Frasers—throwing off his snow-shoes, and sometimes creeping on all fours, after he had got farther into the wood. His example was followed by all the rest, and the snow-shoes were left to be gathered up by the last one on the trail.

Though the sound seemed to be near at times, and grew more and more satisfactory, with every change of the wind, so that all who had much experience felt sure it was the stripping of bark, still, they were not so sure of the direction, and it was a long while before there seemed to be any agreement among them. The Brigadier followed Barleigh's track, though it seemed to take him away from the sound; the others moved about, hither and thither, as if completely bewildered. For, at times, the sound seemed to be all around them, a sort of confusion, like the talk and the low rumbling of tree branches.

Suddenly there was a stop, and then they heard voices a long way off, shouting "Stop! stop! and see the dog!" This was followed by the trotting and clattering of some huge beast, on his way through the thickest part of the woods.

After a short halt, they heard the voice of Barleigh, shouting:

"There he goes! Look out for yourselves! There he goes!"

Every man looked to his priming and stood still, waiting for the onset.

And now the dogs were let loose, and away they scampered, yelling like so many furies, and followed by the whole party. One might have been pardoned if he had mistaken the whole pageant for a rehearsal of "Der Freischütz."

Another shot! and still the noise continued. They could hear the creature, whatever it was, tumbling over the fallen trees and snorting with rage and terror.

"Head him off! head him off!" shouted the Brigadier. "Don't let him take to the woods!"

"There he goes! rattlety-bang! full split! hurrah!" shouted another and another, as they started off in the direction of the noise.

At last, they had a glimpse of the creature, taking his way out of the woods, with his antlers thrown back, so as to make a path six feet wide, into the clearing, and up, toward the nearest hillside, followed, after a few minutes, by the cow and two calves.

The hunters were too far off to follow them with any hope of success, but they heard the yelping of the puppies and then two more shots in quick succession, succeeded by a loud hurrah from three different voices, afar off—one of which proved to be that of the young stranger, whom they had left adjusting the wolf-trap, a long way behind.

"Bear a hand there, boys! bear a hand, will ye!" shouted the Brigadier, in a voice that might have been heard a mile, through that clear, cold atmosphere. "Bear a hand, I say, and bring the snow-shoes!"

Ned Frazier now appeared, just on the edge of a little copse, in the act of loading his gun. Still further off was the schoolmaster, standing near a large tree, as if waiting for a charge, with his gun resting on the hollow of his left arm.

"Which way, Uncle Jeremiah—which way?" said he.

"There! *there*!" shouted the old man: "follow him! or we shall lose him, arter all!"

"But the calves! and the cow!" screamed Ned.

"Never mind the calves! they are both of 'em as dead as a floor nail!"

"But we might stop long enough to put the mother out of her misery!"

"To be sure we might, if the poor simpleton would only stop long enough to let us come up with her," said the Brigadier. "But, halloo! there go the puppies, lickety-split! and, if she stops to fight with them, its all up with her! And so she does, by jingo! Hourrah!"

After a short though severe run, the poor beast tumbled head foremost into a deep gully, and lay there floundering and kicking till the schoolmaster came up, and put a ball through her

just back of the forearm, as she was breaking her way through the crust toward a thicket, where she could not be followed.

But the bull had escaped; and it was a good hour—perhaps an hour and a half—before they were all mounted on their snow-shoes and ready to follow the Brigadier, who sung out to them to throw off their great-coats and grub-baskets, and canteens, and make up their minds for moose-meat on the morrow, if not before.

Away went the moose, and away went the puppies, yelping on his track and snapping at his heels, obliging him to turn about, to try and trample them to death, every twenty rods or so; but the creatures always took good care not to come in front, where he could strike them with his terrible fore-feet, or reach them with his antlers.

One thing had astonished the Brigadier and Burleigh from the first. Here it was, past the middle of February—almost March, indeed—and the magnificent creature had not cast his horns! Instead of the knobs which they expected to find on the mule, here were the prodigious antlers, that would have been a real wonder months before—among the largest and finest they had ever seen or heard of. With his head lifted, they were about eleven feet from the ground.

"Might not this account for the story poor Liddy told about the horns she saw away up in the air, at the time she was so frightened in the milk-yard?" said Burleigh, the first time he was near enough to speak to the Brigadier, after they had both seen the creature, crowned and sceptered, thundering along his way with a noise like that of wild horses, or a tramping herd of buffaloes.

"Wal, Iry," said the Brigadier, shaking his head, and wiping off the perspiration with the sleeve of his coat, "all I have to say is, that I never see'd such a thing afore, and never hearn tell of such horns at this season of the year; and, by thunder, Iry, you're right! This must be the very beast Liddy saw. Not at all likely there are two o' them critters with sech horns, about now."

"And if so," said Burleigh, "it may be the very same that the two Fraziers tracked so far. Did you understand them to say that they ever got a sight of him?"

"Let's inquire," said the old man; and he did inquire, the first time they passed near enough to be questioned. The answer was that they did have a glimpse of one magnificent fellow with enormous horns, at a distance, but too far off for a shot. Of course they could not say that the tracks they were following were his tracks; but they might be so, nevertheless, though the horns were seen by moonlight, through the blinding snow, in a different direction, and perhaps much nearer than they had supposed.

The hunters were now entering upon the hardest part of the

chase. Being widely scattered, there was no chance for intercommunication. All they were safe in doing, therefore, was to follow the Brigadier and the schoolmaster, till they lost sight of them, and then to keep the track of any shadow they might happen to catch a glimpse of, along the nearest hillside, and through the clearings, which began to be more frequent as they got nearer and nearer the great lumber region, where the arbutus reaches a growth of sixty feet. The flashing sunlight dazzled their eyes, at every turn, as the trooping clouds drifted away over the glittering crust, like giant shadows after their prey.

On went the whole company, one after another, at long intervals, the old man leading off, and Burleigh and Ned Frazier following, though somewhat away from his track. Their snow-shoes carried them with what was called the Indian leap—a sort of uncouth, swinging leap, exceedingly tiresome, and rather dangerous to beginners—at a prodigious rate along their way.

After a while, as Burleigh and Frazier began to close upon the Brigadier, they saw him stop, as if listening; and the next moment they heard, far away on their right, a sound like the baying of a dog, and then, “By Jupiter!” shouted somebody, just in the edge of the nearest hardwood growth, “if that ain’t old Watch!”

“That, I should think, was Luther,” said Burleigh, “and lucky for him it is, I tell *you*, Mr. Frazier, that his father was not near enough to catch what he said—”

“But, I say though—don’t you hear a howling?” said Frazier; “don’t *you*, Mr. Burleigh?”

Burleigh listened a moment, and then said: “Wolves! but they are lining off in that direction,” pointing toward the camp, “and are probably hunting a moose for supper.”

“And what chance have they?”

“The best possible chance, over a crust like this. They don’t break through, and he does, whenever they overtake him, and he turns and leaps upon them. He is sure to break through at last, and then they are sure to have him, while he is lumbering and plunging.”

“Poor fellow!”

“Ah, a shot!”

Another and another followed, and so near they could almost see the flash. Then, but much farther off, they heard the yelping of curs, followed by the baying of a large dog, and the faint and far-off howling of wolves in full cry, but nothing was to be seen.

“Yes, they’ll have him, and there’s no help for it now,” said Burleigh. “But, see here!—What’s in the wind now?”

At this moment, they saw the old man level his gun at something; then he paused—and then, after a few moments, lowered it, as if he had changed his mind or was too far off. Then he

passed over the ridge, at a swinging trot, like that of the moose himself. Both followed, but soon lost sight of him.

"This will never do!" said Burleigh. "With his prodigious bodily strength, unabated as you see, he will find himself alone, and beyond the reach of help, if any thing should happen. Let us head him off."

"Head him off! I should like to see you try! I'd as soon think of heading off a gray moose in the rutting season. Just look at the old fellow! I should think he was in for a Lurde race. There! there! Look! look!"

"Nevertheless, we must do it, for the woods are all alive with some sort of game; and there is no safety for any of us, if we do not bring the creature down at the first fire, unless we have somebody with us."

So, on they pushed, trying to cut off the Brigadier, who was evidently following somebody, or something, of which he had occasional glimpses, in a wide, circular sweep.

Hour after hour passed in this way, and still they seemed to be no nearer that old Nimrod, as the young stranger called him, till they saw him throw off his great-coat and fling it into the bushes, then sweep away to their left.

"We shall have him now!" said Burleigh, steering straight for a cluster of large trees. "The game is going to yard, and I shouldn't be surprised to find two or three families together. Hush!"

He stopped and listened; then, beckoning Frazier to follow, he dashed forward, as if in pursuit of something.

After a few minutes, on turning a corner of the nearest wood, they saw the Brigadier leaning against a tree, all out of breath and completely exhausted, with his coat off, shirt-bosom open, and waistcoat flying.

He was hardly able to speak, and stood fanning himself with his broad beaver, and looking as happy, and as perfectly satisfied with himself, as heart could desire.

"Well, my good sir, what's the matter?—what's happened?" said Frazier.

"Guns loaded?"

"Yes."

"I thought I saw smoke comin' out o' the muzzle o' yours, Master Burleigh."

Master Burleigh shook his head with a miserable attempt at a smile; but, just then, the Brigadier pointed to an object, half a mile off—a dark spot on the sloping side of the nearest hill. The schoolmaster's countenance brightened up as with inward sunshine, and his eyes flashed fire.

"You see it, do you, my boy?" said the Brigadier to the schoolmaster, flinging him a step on the shoulder.

"See what?" said Frazier. "I don't see any thing."

"Don't you see that large, black spot on the hill-side yonder?"

"No, sir; I don't see any thing"

"Wal, that's a moose!"

"A moose!"

"What say you, Iry?"

"Certainly, sir, that's a moose. But the game is up for to-night, and we shall have to camp where we are."

"Here! Zounds! with nothing to eat, no covering from the cold, hey?" said Frazier, "and all our grub half a day's journey behind! A pretty job we shall make of it, with the thermometer down half a yard below zero."

"Even so," said the schoolmaster; "but there's no help for it, and to-morrow we shall have moose-meat enough, and to spare, I promise you. Meanwhile we must keep together, and get along as well as we can, with spruce boughs and hemlock spreads for coverlets and blankets, and two or three hard boiled eggs apiece for supper."

"You seem to be mighty sure of moose-meat to-morrow," said Frazier; "but, for my own part, I must acknowledge that I have my misgivings. In fact, I don't understand the business at all."

"Don't you see the critter's turned in for the night, my doo?"

"Turned in! How so?"

"Gone to bed! He knows he's safe now. It will soon be dark, and we can't follow him much farther, at any rate."

"Gone to bed! What eyes you must have, Gin'ral! I can see nothing but what looks like an old burnt stump, and I'm not very sure I see that."

Nor did he. He was looking in quite another direction; but when the Brigadier took him by the elbow and pointed with his gun, he was soon able to see something, and then to see that something move.

The hunters now dug a hole in the snow, and piled up a breastwork of boughs about the edge, and half filled the cavity with cedar, spruce and pine branches. This done they all turned in, shivering, stiff and sore.

"Here, Gin'ral," said Frazier. "Take my coat, will ye?"

The Brigadier refused, but with a portentous shake of the head, and chattering teeth:

"I'm not so young as I was once," he said, "or I shouldn't mind the cold any more than I do the tramp."

"Come, come, Uncle Jeremiah," said Barclay, "it's no use talking. We can spare you some of our clothes."

"And you must take them, too, or you'll be frozen stiff as a mitten before sunrise."

Thus ended that day's hunt; and they slept soundly, disturbed by nothing, till peep of day, when—— but we must open another chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEATH-STRUGGLE.

IN the morning, though stiff and sore, the hardy men were astir, on the track of their prey, long before daylight. Hungry as tigers, with only the stars to guide them, and no dogs, they set off in the direction of the black spot which they had seen the night before on the slope of the hill.

On their way, the Brigadier leading off, by a circuit which would bring them to the leeward of the place without being seen, if they skirted the edge of the dark, silent woods, they came to a spot which, after sunrise, would command a view of the country for miles. Here they rested, hoping to hear from the dogs in time for the chase, if they could manage to get near the creature without alarming him.

"General," said the schoolmaster to Uncle Jeremiah, as the two sat on stumps a little apart from the rest of the band, now gathered again, "how do you feel this morning? You look pale."

"Do I? Rather stiff in the joints, Iry—rather stiff, I must acknowledge. I'm not the man I was five-and-twenty years ago; but, I hope to carry my end o' the yoke for a while yet."

"How did you sleep?"

"Not so well as I used to. I never suffered so much from the cold before. Somebody must have left the bars down, and there's no tuckin' a fellow up with spruce boughs and hemlock branches."

"But you seem to be out of spirits, General. Hadn't we better give up the chase and go back to camp?"

"What! give up the chase when we've trapped the game? Go back to camp after one day's trial? Why, man alive, what do you take me for?"

"For just what you are, sir—a man of ten thousand; still, at your age—"

"Well, Iry, I may as well out with it. I am a little the worse for wear, and a little down in the mouth to-day, that's a fact. I've had an ugly dream. Do you believe in dreams, Iry?"

"Can't say I do, sir; and yet, strange things have happened to me after certain dreams. My father had wonderful revelations, I have been told, in that way."

"Yes; and that reminds me of something I have intended to ask you about, ever since night afore last, when we was all so much frightened."

"Frightened, sir?"

"To be sure. Wasn't you frightened, Iry? Come, now, honor bright; wasn't you frightened?"

"I hardly know how to answer you, sir. That I was troubled and perplexed, I acknowledge, but—"

"Look at me, Iry Barleigh; look me right in the eye, and answer me without flinching. I watched you narrowly at the time of the hubbub, when you didn't know I was looking at you."

"You are a little mistaken there, General; I knew you were watching me, as a cat would a mouse, and I behaved accordingly."

"Posserble! You're deep, Iry Barleigh—very deep—and so was your father before you; but let's come to the pint."

"If you please."

"Do you believe, or do you not, Iry, that our old house is haunted?"

"Before I answer that question allow me to ask you what you would have me understand by being haunted?"

"Lower your voice, Iry; I see Ned Frazier looking this way. The question I wanted to ask you was, if you believed the noises we heard the other night were made by sperrits?"

"What spirits, General?"

"The sperrits that Father Cummins and all the neighbors testified to before I bought the Blaisdell farm."

"No, sir; I can not say I do."

"Do you think the noises we heard was made by Jerusay Jane, or the children?"

"Some were, and some were not, I think."

"And how about them that wasn't, hey?"

"Some were made by the windows, and some by the chimney, and the storm."

"Iry Barleigh, look at me; I put the question to you as a dying man."

"As a dying man, sir! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say, Iry; I'm near the end o' my journey. I've had a warnin', Iry, and now I want you to tell me what you know, and what you believe about the whispering we heard in the house."

"Well, sir, as you seem to have taken the matter so much to heart, I will own that I can not account for the whispering, or the voices."

"Then you heard voices, did you?"

"Yes, from the cellar and the wood-house, and the pantry, unmistakably distinct—human voices."

"Wal, go on, if you please."

"Have you ever read the affidavits that were published by Father Cummings and others?"

"Yes, but never till within the last month or so; and that's what troubles me. I had hearn ever so much about the

Blaisdell house, long before I thought of settlin' here. They said it was haunted, and if I would see Parson Cummin's—Abraham Cummin's—or Mr. Butler—George Butler, or Thomas Man, they would show me the written testimony of more than fifty witnesses that had seen the sperrit of Mrs. Butler with their own eyes, some of them in broad daylight, and some at a funeral, if I don't mistake."

"You are right, sir. Such is their testimony."

"Wal, as I didn't believe a word of all these stories, and was offered the farm for a quarter of its worth, I determined to buy, haunted or not haunted, and take the consequences. I didn't mind livin' in a haunted house, nor bein' laughed at; and never give the stories a second thought, as I remember now, till about a month ago, when I heerd a strange knockin' in different parts of the house, one day, when all the family had gone to meetin', and I was left alone to take care o' the house, not bein' able to stir about much, on account of my rheumatiz; but you don't seem startled a bit, Iry?"

"I suppose not, sir; but go on, if you please."

"Wal, soon arter this my bed was lifted up, and, at another time, I heerd voices in conversation close by me. I had taken advantage of the stories, you see, to buy the house and farm for a song, as it were—I had taken advantage of the fatherless and the widow—and now the judgment is upon me."

"I do not see that, sir."

"Bat I do; and now, what I want to know of you is, if you believe the affidavits you saw were honestly given."

"I do."

"And by honest people?"

"So far as I can judge, yes; most of them I know, and I have inquired about the others, and they all bear good characters. Some of them are eminently pious, and sober-minded, Christian men and women. As for Parson Cummings, he was a graduate of Harvard University, and a man of unquestionable scholarship. I have the pamphlet he published, in 1830, I believe; at any rate, I know the female specter appeared in the month of August that year. The book is at your service, whenever you would like to see it. You seem troubled, sir?"

"I am troubled, Iry. I have done wrong; and, what's more, I can't break off the dismal shadow my dream has left on me."

"What was your dream, sir?"

"I can't bear to think of it, Iry; but, the substance of it was, that the avenger of blood was arter me, and the specter of Mrs. Butler—George Butler's first wife—told me that I should soon be wanted, and that the sign would be the sprinklin' of blood on my path. Ah, there's the puppies!"

Up sprung Burleigh; up sprung all the others, and all stood listening with their hands to their ears.

"One word more, Iry," said the old man, with a startled look

as if he saw something that Ira could not see; "what do you think of the business, takin' it altogether, by an' large, hey?"

"I think 't is wholly unaccountable—wholly incapable of explanation upon any other hypothesis than that the stories are substantially true."

"Then I'm a dead man, Iry Burleigh! and, if I live through this day, it's the last time I go after moose."

Again the far-off yelping of dogs in full cry was heard, but in a direction opposite to that which they were taking. The next moment a signal was made by one of the Fraziers, who was on the look-out. All hurried up to find out what it meant. Before they had reached him, however, the Brigadier, who had been so startled by the sudden burst of the dogs as to lose his self-possession for a moment, made a motion for them all to separate; then he checked himself, and pointed to a dark object, which seemed to be moving at no great distance from them, athwart a large open clearing.

"There he goes! there he goes!" shouted all the Fraziers, greatly to the displeasure of Burleigh and the Brigadier.

"You go that way, my lads, and I will go this. I'm sure he sees us, and the sooner we're on his track the better. You may holler now as much as you like—it will only confuse him. Oh, if we only had the peppies here!"

Saying which, he led off in full sight of the moose, followed by Burleigh. The others continued their course along the outer edge of the wood, gradually contracting the circle as the creature moved about, evidently bewildered by the number and position of his enemies. At one moment he seemed resolute on crossing the open pasture, with his large, shuffling trot, and the next to go back to the covert of the nearest wood. That he was not seriously hurt was evident enough by his motions.

"Halloo!" shouted the Brigadier, as the creature came out in full view, but, after a moment's pause, he dashed headlong into the nearest undergrowth, crushing through it like a river-horse through the reeds of the Nile. "Halloo! that's the very boy we're after! Just look at his horns!"

They were magnificent to be sure—among the largest ever seen by the oldest of the party.

"Hurrah! there goes the peppies!" and sure enough they were heard in full cry, not half a mile off.

The old man hurried forward with a tremendous swing in the direction they seemed to be going, while the schoolmaster took a shorter cut for the woods, hoping to overtake the beast before he could enter the undergrowth.

Cries were now distinctly heard afar off; then the baying of a large dog; then the yelping of a wounded cur; then a shot; then all the sounds seemed to be coming nearer.

"Suddenly, just as the old man was hurrying across a wide

reach of glittering crust, on his way from one patch of dwarf hemlocks to another, there came a terrible shouting and screaming from two or three different quarters, which bewildered him for a moment; and, before he could recollect himself, there was a great crashing close at hand; and, as he planted his feet with his gun leveled in the direction of the noise, there came a cry from behind, which seemed to be very near, and which would to say, might well have made the head of the most experienced hunter run cold.

"Look out, sir! Look out! Run for your life!" shouted Barkish, with an agonizing cry. "Give him a shot, and run for your life!"

But before the old man could face round to meet a new enemy, the terrible beast came crashing through the outer growth, and steering straight for him.

Great as the danger was, and near as it was, the Brigadier waited for a chance back of the fore-shoulder; but, finding the creature coming head on, without turning to the right or left, he let fly at the center of his chest. This shot brought the ball to his knees; but the next moment, after one or two desperate plunges, he was upon his feet again, and charged, at a furious gallop, on the Brigadier.

"Take to a tree!" shouted Barkish! "take to a tree, for God's sake, till I can get near enough for a shot."

The old man started, and, for a few minutes, as the enraged animal broke through the crust, now and then, there seemed to be a good chance for escape; but only for a moment.

At the very next leap the creature was evidently gaining upon him. He heard the snorting and plunging, and almost felt the breathing over his shoulder. Whereupon, as a last hope, he tore off his outer garment, and flung it down upon the snow. The monster stopped and trampled upon it, furiously, and came on again. He now threw away his hat, which the wild took and carried out of their course; then, just as the dogs came yelping over the snow, he tripped, stumbled, and fell headlong, and the terrible beast was upon him before he could recover himself, and he was with a new shock.

But the fearless man did not lose his presence of mind for a moment. He knew that Barkish was at hand; he heard the baying of a large dog, which he believed to be Watch; and, as the animal seemed ready to trample him in the snow, he rolled over on his side, out of reach of the descending hoofs. The creature's fore-foot broke through the crust with his weight and momentum, so as to bring a branch of his mother's near the prostrate man. Instantly the old fellow grasped it with both hands, and was lifted to his knees. At that moment Watch rushed to the rescue, making a furious bound at the creature's throat, just as Uncle Jerry caught a glimpse of Barkish within range, kneeling, with his gun leveled, but hesitating.

"Fire away, Burleigh! never mind me!" shouted the old hunter. "Let him have it! Blaze away!"

The animal reared and plunged with frantic fury. The huge antler, which the old man had grasped, already loosened perhaps by the tremendous energy of that long burst through the undergrowth, came off in his hands, like a thunder-blasted branch — exasperating the creature to madness. Instantly Uncle Jeremiah transferred his grasp, seizing the other antler finally with both hands. He was literally lifted into the air, while clinging to it. It was the moment of life or death to the hunter.

Burleigh fired.

The still woods rung with the report: echoes answered from the nearest hillside, with a rattle of musketry; the enraged monster pitched headlong into the deep snow just as he was rearing to strike the helpless old man with his fore-foot, which would have settled the business forever; old Watch fastened upon the beast by that hanging upper lip—the maul, or maul-fion, we have all heard so much of.

Undiscouraged, though terribly wounded and bruised and bleeding, the Brigadier threw himself upon the straggling bull, and soon finished him with a plunge of his long hunting-knife, and a wipe across the throat, before Burleigh could interfere.

Then didn't the skies ring! and didn't the woods answer to the wild hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! which burst forth from two or three different quarters, intermingled with the ponderous bark of old Watch, and the yelp of at least half a dozen scampering whelps.

"Hurrah for the old hunter!"

"Hurrah for Uncle Jeremiah!"

"Hurrah for the squire! Hurrah for father!" shouted they, one after another, as they came up, all out of breath, and none of them with their guns smoking at the muzzle.

"Load, boys! load!" shouted the old man. "A pretty set of moose-hunters to be sure! How do we know the battle is over? Load, I say, and make yourselves smart!"

Having loaded and primed, they held a short consultation. It was finally determined to scour the neighbouring wood with the dogs, while preparations were under way for a supper of moose-meat, either where they were, by throwing up a temporary lodge, or at the camp, which the squire hunter told them they might reach before midnight as the early fogs, even if they spent half a day longer in scouring the woods.

Whereupon the old man, who had already cut out the moose, and got possession of the liver and heart, called upon all hands to help him stack the marrow-bones, and get off a lot of stock.

"With all my heart!" said Burleigh, springing down into the trampled and bloody snow, where the animal had almost buried himself in his struggles; and, whipping out a knife, he soon

carved enough of the best pieces to satisfy their hunger for the next forty-eight hours.

"And now, what's to be done?" said he, to the Brigadier.

"What's to be done? Push for the yard. We can't be far from it now. We may find two or three families there—halloo! where's that Ned Frazier goin'?"

"Off, as you bid him, Gin'ral," said the youngest brother—"didn't you tell him to be off and make himself scarce?"

Burleigh turned upon the speaker with a suddenness that seemed threatening; and then added, with a serious look: "You had better follow your brother, sir, and keep as near him as you are able; and, my notion is, that a dog or two wouldn't come amiss, if you keep together."

"That's your sort, Iry! There'll be no safety for any of us, if we separate beyond call," added the Brigadier; and then, as the others moved away, he added, in a low voice, while making a sign for them all to push ahead: "My dream is out, Iry!"

"Yes, indeed, I hope so."

"An evil dream, Iry Burleigh; but," lifting both hands to the sky, "but I have got a lesson I shall never forget. I see now why that Butler woman appeared to me in my sleep."

"And why was it, sir?"

"To bring me face to face with death, and oblige me to give up the Blaisiell farm."

Burleigh shook his head. "Never, my good sir, never! Why should you give it up? You offered more than anybody else did, and it had to be sold."

"Very true, Iry; but I didn't believe the stories, and other people did, or they might have given somethin' like its valley."

"But you believe the stories now, don't you? If I understand you now, you find they were right, and you wrong."

"Very true, Iry; but somehow I've ben a growin' more and more uneasy for the last month; and now that I have ben lookin' a bull moose in the eyes, just ready to trample me to death, somehow things don't seem to me as they did; and after we get back to the house, I must have some talk with you about the business, and maybe I shall have some papers for you to draw up."

"Well, I understand you; but there is time enough yet, and we are not to act upon hasty impressions, or sudden impulse."

"Time enough yet! How do I know that, Iry? This woman not two hours ago, you might have said the same thing."

"Well, well, there's nothing to be done till we get back to the house, and therefore—"

"At the camp, Iry."

"Perhaps; but what are we to do now? Shall we stay by the stuff, and take our share of the spoil, when it comes?"

"No; but if you'll stay here, and get things ready for a lunch, I'll push on arter the rest o' the crew."

"Excuse me, sir; I do not like to leave you; but here, of course, we have nothing to be afraid of, and the boys must come back this way, or go without their supper. And so, if you've no objection, I'll push ahead for a while, and see what's in the wind."

"Agreed; and, as I'm pretty well tickered out, and begin to feel my old rheumatiz comin' on—"

Barleigh smiled—almost. "No wonder," said he, "after the siege you have had with that monster there."

"But," continued the Brigadier, "if that was Luther's voice we heard, and I think it was—and now that Watch is here, I feel pretty sartin 'twas—if you should happen to see him, I wish you would start him off this way; I want to know what he left the camp for—ah! as sure as you're alive, there he comes now! and that's the reason why old Watch started off into the woods by himself jest now."

"Wal, father, how goes it with you, to-day?" said Luther, coming up on a dog trot, with Watch at his heels; "got rid of your rheumatiz?"

"Pretty much. But I say, Luther, what did you leave the camp for?"

"Couldn't help it, father. Watch broke away, arter draggin' me over the snow, for five minutes at a time, afore I give up; and I had to follow him, or shoot him, an' he was a little too sunnin' for that, for he wouldn't allow me to get near enough."

"Why not let him go?"

"Let him go, arter what you said!"

"Right boy, right! I see; but what'll become of the camp, and the cattle?"

"Oh, all safe. Smith and Jones and neighbor Lippy come up to jyne us, and not knowin' which way to start, they concluded to stop there til they could hear from you. But I say, father, who was't cut the rope of the mouse trap on the way up?"

"Did you come that way, Luther?"

"Yes; I followed Watch, and he took me arter your trail."

Barleigh had started off, but on hearing the last question stopped for the answer.

"Wasn't the trap set when you passed that way, now?"

"Set? no indeed! The rope had been cut, and the spring had kicked itself."

The Brigadier interchanged a look with the old hunter and exclaimed: "Just what I was afraid of!"

"Mightn't I see the Fraziers; then, turning to Luther, he asked him if he had seen the Fraziers, especially Ned Frazier?"

"Yes, father, all three; but who sprung the trap? that's what I want to know."

"Never mind now, Luther. Try, hurry for your life, and when you see the Fraziers, tell them to keep out of the way; there's mischief brewin'."

Burleigh started off at full swing, with a troubled expression of countenance, which seemed to puzzle the boy, though his father understood it, as a matter of life and death; but before he was beyond ear-shot, Uncle Jerry appeared to recollect himself, and called after him:

"Don't let 'em go back to camp for their lives, Irv! Bring 'em all back here, and we'll have a supper ready for 'em."

"Supper?" said Luther, looking up at the sun.

"Wal, then, lunch, or dinner, or whatever you please. They'll be hungry enough to make the best of it, I'll warrant ye, call it what you like."

"Yes, father."

"And we'd better be quick about it, my boy, for they may be down upon us within the next hour, though I don't expect 'em afore sunset. If they happen to be a long way off, they'll begin to steer for camp when the sun is about three hours high."

"You want kindlin' stuff, don't you, father?"

"Yes; take my hatchet and split off some of the pitch-wood knots from the driest stumps you can find, while I get ready for the steaks. Ah, ha! that's your sort! Spring to it, Luther!"

Away went the great fellow, and by the time his father had sliced a haunch of the moose into steaks, and got the liver under way, and the precious moutle, and had cracked two of the marrow-bones, the boy was back with an armful of what he called "kindlin' stuff."

While the fire was beginning to burn, and the steaks to "sizzle" on gril lrons made of pitch-pine, with "rocks" underneath, and the old man, with his hat off, hair flying loose, and shirt-sleeves rolled up, was at the busiest, he stopped suddenly, and listened; and then, pointing to Luther's gun, which stood leaning against a stump, asked in a whisper if it was loaded.

"Yes, father."

"And primed?"

"I'll see, father."

"I'll see, father! Blockhead! It may be as much as your life is worth to see now. Get behind me, and lay down flat in the snow," seizing his gun as he spoke, opening the pan, and shaking the loose powder into its place; then, after re-adjusting his bullet-pouch and powder-horn, he knelt behind a pile of snow blocks, and waited for something—whatever it was—to approach.

But nothing appeared. And after waiting a few minutes and sweeping the whole intervening space between them and the woods, he laid away the gun, saying he must have been mistaken, and went to work with his preparations for supper.

But poor Luther grew uneasy, and old Wach seemed restless and sat upon his hanches with his eyes fixed upon a very distant clump of trees—far beyond a bullet range—occasionally

shaking his ears, and looking down at Luther, muttering to himself and slapping his tail on the hard crust.

"What was it, father?" said he, at last, raising himself on both elbows.

"Get your gun, Luther, and I'll tell you."

Luther got the gun. The old man tried it with the ramrod, dropped a fresh priming into the pan, pricked the touch-hole and then handing it back to his boy, said:

"Don't you let that gun be out o' your reach, while you're with me, if you valley your life. There's no knowin' what may happen."

"Yes, father; but you haven't answered me: you never do answer my questions. I want to know what you saw just now."

"Wal, I thought I saw the shadow of an Injun just over there"—pointing—"no, not there, just beyond that old hemlock. It was only for a moment, and it was gone like a flash."

"Did you hear any thing?"

"No; I listened and listened, but I heerd nothin' whatever. How should we, at such a distance, Luther? Moccasins don't creak."

"But maybe he had snow-shoes, father?"

"Not by a jag-fall! without he was arter moose or cariboo. And by the way; that reminds me of something, Luther. What firin' was that I heerd just afore you jyned us?"

"Ain't sure, father. Some o' the Fraziers fired two or three shot apiece; but there must a' ben somebody else about, we couldn't see."

"Injuns, perhaps. Did you see any stray dogs?"

"No, father; but I heerd a kind o' bark that I never heerd from our dogs; it was more like what you hear among the 'Nobscots—a kind o' snarl, and then a snap or two."

"That's enough, my boy! I'm satisfied now. The Penobscots are on our track, and we must be on our watch, night and day, and sleep with one eye open, Luther."

"Yes, father; but what for? What have we to be afraid of, with the Penobscots?"

The old man stopped short, and in the fewest possible words told him about Ned Frazier's cutting the nose and springing the trap.

Luther shuddered, and grew faint.

Their preparations finished—the red, jolly stock well wrapped through, to be finished off at the last moment, they sat and waited, hour after hour, wondering that nobody came, till the sunset faded away, and they could withstand the darkness no longer. The Brigadier had already fastened on the deer-skins now so much prized by old hunters, and, while smoking his pipe, tried to persuade Luther to take a hand; but the sight of his father so employed was too much for him, and he turned away

with such a loathing, that even after a bit of steak had been properly done for him, hungry as he was, or thought he was, he could hardly eat a mouthful.

His father only laughed at him, and offered him a bit of brown bread which he happened to find in his pocket, a dry crust of rye-and-indian, which he proposed to smear with shank-marrow; but Luther snatched greedily at the crust, and left the marrow—the moose butter—for more experienced epicures.

While they were thus employed, Watch spring suddenly to his feet, and uttered a low growl, then a fierce bark. Soon voices were heard from the nearest woods, and one after another of the party came dropping in—all but the younger Frazier.

“Wal, Iry, have you seen him?” said the Brigadier.

“No; we’ve scoured the woods for a circuit of miles, and fired signals, but have not come upon a trace of the foolish fellow.”

“Just like Ned!” exclaimed the oldest brother. “Always in some kind o’ deviltry—and I shouldn’t at all wonder if he had gone off home.”

“Or maybe,” added the youngest, “maybe he’s gone to see some of the pretty squaws and papposes, you have so many of down East.”

The Brigadier grew thoughtful, and the schoolmaster more and more anxious.

“But come, come, boys; lay hold here and let’s see if you know any thing about moose-meat,” said the Brigadier, pushing a large slice of the haunch, hot and smoking, toward Bob Frazier. “Help yourselves! Make yourselves at home. Here, Watch, if you haven’t got a belly-fall, now’s your time, old fellow!”

And then, having finished their supper, they looked to their guns, posted one of the party for a sentinel, with Watch for a keeper, and turned in.

CHAPTER VII.

COMPLICATIONS.

THE next day, our hunters, worn out, or completely “knocked up,” as the two Fraziers called it, and stiff and sore, instead of starting off on another expedition, before daybreak, determined to lie abed, and take it easy, till after breakfast; and, as they lay in a circle with their feet to the fire, while the Brigadier, who could not sleep, was getting more moose-meat under

way, they fell into a consultation, which ended with an agreement among them to hold on till they had emptied the yard, if it should take all the rest of the month.

Nor was the old Brigadier at all backward. The arrangement seemed to have been suggested by him, through Barleigh, for he said, "as it was to be the last of his moose-hunting in this world, he meant to make the most of it." And he did.

Luther was sent back to camp, with orders to keep old Watch tied to a tree with a rope strong enough to hold a catamount. The neighbors who had "dropped in" were invited to stay and see what was going on, to help themselves to moose-meat, and guard the camp and the cattle.

"My advice would be to rig up a hand sled or two, and take the carcass of the beast with you, after you have got off the skin, and emptied the bowels," said Barleigh.

"Yes, fry—you're right," added the Brigadier. "That's the way to dicker; or they might make their way to camp, 'cross lots, and come back with a sleigh for the moose: only, I say, Luther, don't allow your guns to go unloaded, nor to be out of reach, or you'll buy the rabbits." And say to neighbor Smith, and neighbor I'll be, that if they know when they're well off, they'll stick to the camp and wait there for us, instead of goin' arter moose-meat—live moose-meat, I mean. We shall be back in a few days at farthest, and there's plenty of feller for 'em, hey?"

"Yes, father, and I'll do the errand for you, and ask 'em to stay by the stuff, as I do—you needn't laugh," said Luther, stopping just outside the lodge.

"Ay, ay, Luther, that's it! And have the share the Elder gives 'em, while the rest of the tribe go to war," said his father.

"Oh—git out!" said Luther, and instantly disappeared.

These arrangements being completed, the party packed up, and started off by different paths, but always keeping in sight of each other, and all aiming in the direction of that maple growth, which the schoolmasters knew so well acquainted with.

Still, though the distance was not so great as they had supposed, they were obliged to move so carefully and slowly, that they did not reach a good reconnoitering position till near night fall. After a brief consultation between the Brigadier and Barleigh, the others were ordered to keep together, make no noise and wait for further instructions, being careful not to show themselves till they were wanted, while Barleigh pushed bravely ahead, leaving the Brigadier to follow where he saw fit.

At the end of a long and laborious tramp, they entered a tangled undergrowth, and taking off their snow-shoes, the schoolmaster went on his way in moccasins, the Brigadier in heavy cowhide boots, with baskins. Finally they came in sight of the sugar-maple growth, and approaching it on the leeward with the stealthy tread of a catamount, were soon able to satisfy

themselves upon two or three questions. After reconnoitering, from different points, till it had grown so dark that they could hardly see their hands before them, they found a large open space, trampled and trodden like a cow-yard, showing that two or three "families" had been there, and were likely to return, for the trees were not wholly stripped of their bark, and not one in twenty down to the snow, while the young buds and tender twigs were still abundant.

"Iry—my lad—what say you to that?" whispered the Brigadier, almost doubling himself up, and rubbing his hands with uncommon glee. "Of course they'll be back afore long, and we must be ready for 'em, hey?"

"Yes, and we shall want all the help we can get, sir."

"Too late though, if we begin the attack before the others come up. Most of 'em will get away."

"True, but if we call up the rest of the party, without opening fire, something may happen, and we may lose the whole. Then, too, we must have the dogs."

"To be sure, if we have to follow 'em over the snow; but I should be afraid of bringin' any of 'em up, while the critters are in their yard. They'd only frighten 'em, and—"

"You're right, sir, and in the hurry and eagerness of young sportsmen, the chances are, that some of us would get shot. So I'm for staying here till we know whether they are coming home to yard, or not."

"Agreed."

Hour after hour they watched and waited, until, overcome with sleep, the Brigadier sat on the snow leaning against a stump, with his gun over his knees, and Burleigh standing sentinel, where he could take in the whole yard with the chief trails and approaches, at one view. Afraid to leave his post—trails and approaches, at one view. Afraid to leave his post—afraid to be caught napping—he was loth even to sit down; and having thrown his overcoat across the shoulders of the stout old man, he found it no easy matter to keep from freezing. If he stood stock still in the snow, there was no hope; yet, if he made the least noise by stirring about, or rubbing his hands—for throwing his arms was out of the question altogether—he would be sure to frighten the prey, if any were lurking about in the neighborhood.

So the tedious, lonely night wore away, the longest he had ever passed in all his adventurous life, and there were no signs of encouragement—no sounds to keep their blood warm—and nothing to justify a longer stay.

"Wal, now," said the Brigadier, waking up suddenly and grasping his gun, but speaking in a low voice with the wariness of an old hunter, who is never to be taken by surprise, whether among wild beasts, or savages; "wal, now, Iry, what's to be done now? They've all cleared out, sars enough; and, if we want more moose-meat, we must follow their trail, hey?"

"Yes, after we have got all our boys together, and had our breakfast, and got something in our pouches better than hard-boiled eggs, with rye-an'-indian crust, and a pinch of salt."

The Brigadier nodded assent, and then added: "Very true, fry, but hard-boiled eggs with a pinch of salt, is not to be sneezed at, when we're in such a fix, as we was yesterday. If I hadn't stuffed all your pockets, and insisted on you taking 'em with you, even though you might have to throw 'em away, when you got heated in the chase, we should have had a belly-ache apiece for our supper, and nothin' more."

Considering the matter anew, it was at last determined that the Brigadier should stay by the maple-growth, while the schoolmaster went back to notify the others and prepare them all—or at least as many as had the pluck—for another tramp of day after day on the trail of the missing families.

"The peeling of this tree seems fresh, you see, and there's a Leap o' twigs and little new buds, layin' about on the snow," said the Brigadier.

"The trail over there that I examined just now," added the schoolmaster, "is marked with fresh prints, for a red or two, as if at least half a dozen moose had gone over it, within the last four-and-twenty hours. Could they have been frightened away by any of our party, think you, sir?"

"No, indeed! Most of us was miles from here, unless, to be sure, that confounded Frazier has been here."

"Edward Frazier, you mean?"

"Yes, the mutton-head. I do wonder where the plague he's gone to. After the squaws, maybe, as Bob Frazier said."

Barleigh had grown thoughtful. He made no answer, but started off on the return voyage, waving his hand to the Brigadier, without lifting it above his head.

It was a long way—much longer than he had supposed, while measuring it in company under the stimulus of a new alcohol. But, soon after three, he came in sight of the opening where they had parted. Not a creature was to be seen—not a whisper to be heard; so that, just as he had begun to believe that he had either mistaken the place, or the whole party had left the neighborhood, he was startled by the starting of a bear and then by the sudden *clack* of a partridge, within half pistol shot.

"Ah!" said Bob Frazier, in a low whisper, stopping now behind a tree, and making a sign for Barleigh to join up where he stood; "ah, what luck?"

Barleigh nodded, while one after another of the party came up alongside, in perfect silence.

"Any thing here?" said he to the nearest.

"*Here!* I guess you'd think so!" answered the other Frazier. "Woods all alive!"

"All alive! With what, pray?"

"With moose, or Injuna, or cariboo—no: certain o' that."

"Have you seen any thing?"

"Nothing to speak of, except the shadow of a crouching Lunter just over there," pointing to a clump of trees, "a little out of range, you see; and between you and me and the post—you'll excuse me, Master Burleigh, but I do believe on my soul, it was an Indian I saw."

"Indeed! What can he want there?"

"After moose, may be, as we are."

"But, he wouldn't stay in one spot so long."

"How long, pray?"

"If it's the same the Brigadier saw, he must be there for no good purpose. What say you to scaring him up?"

"With all my heart! here goes!" And without stopping to make any further arrangements, off started the two brothers in full sight of the larking savage, completely exposed, in spite of all the schoolmaster could say or do. Just as Ira had looked at the priming of his gun, and was preparing to follow them by a more roundabout way, with his eye fixed on the clump of trees, he saw something move. His attention, however, was directed to a young lad—one of the Smith boys—who came running up to him all out of breath, and put a piece of dirty crumpled paper into his hand, which he had carried in his waistcoat pocket, pinned carefully through several thicknesses of the cloth.

Barleigh seemed rather flurried, as the boy, taking off his ragged hat and fanning himself, said: "I know'd I'd find you—'cause I know'd where to look for you, when they told me you'd gone arter moose."

The schoolmaster, turning away from the boy without answering, read as follows:

"You'll forgive me, I hope, Master B—but, if you would like to get to the bottom of an awful mystery, the sooner we see you down here the better. That's all I have to say—only you have not a minute to lose. I have sent the gray mare, if you would rather come on horseback than in a sleigh.

J. J. P."

"Boy, who gave you this?" said Barleigh.

"Jerusha Jane Pope."

"How's the traveling?"

"Bel enough, without you go horseback."

"Where's the light single sleigh?"

"Down to camp."

"And the gray mare?"

"Off yonder," pointing, "and what's more you'll find some flin' to keep you warm, in the saddle bags, and father's great coat strapped on behind."

"Very well; your name is what?"

"Noah, sir, Noah Smith, at your service."

"Well, Noah Smith, I shall remember you for this; but do you know what I am wanted for?"

"No, indeed, not I! There wasn't much time for talkin', I tell you. Jerusha Jane, she comed over to father's in the middle o' the night and had a talk with mother, and then father called me up, and I started off right away, as soon as they got the saddle-bags ready."

"And if I take the horse, Noah, what are you to do?"

"What am I to do? I'm gwyin to stay here and see the fun. I've campin' out, and I've ben a good deal in the loggin' camp, fast and last, and I want a pop at a bull moose; if you've no objection?"

"Not the least in the world, Noah. Good-by; but don't go after moose without somebody to advise with; or you may wish yourself at home again when wishing will do no good. Good-by!" and off he started for the horse.

"Good by, sir."

At this moment, they were startled by a shot in the distant woods; but, after listening a moment, it seemed so far off, that the remainder of the party did not think it worth while to follow it. As for Burleigh, either he did not hear it, or he was too eager to give it any heed, for he kept on his way, till he found the horse, when, after unstrapping the overcoat so kindly and thoughtfully furnished, he sprung into the saddle and set off on a brisk trot—for the gray mare was a famous trotter and went over the hard, glittering crust, like a fox, without once breaking through. This pace was kept up until after sunset, when they were drawing near the intervale, beyond which was the Brigadier's farm.

Burleigh was a rough rider; and he never drew rein till he came in sight of the house—never halted on the way, even while adjusting his gun which he had slung at his back, till he dismounted in the rear of the large barn.

It was now dark—so dark that he couldn't see the hands of his watch; but by feeling he determined that it was already long past the usual bed hour.

What should he do? Go to the house and take possession, as other people did, at the risk of disturbing the family? or put up the horse, and turn in upon the nearest hay-mow, as perfect strangers often did?

While deliberating with himself he saw a light in the kitchen winnow. The next moment he heard a whisper at his elbow, and something started out from the wall so near as to touch him. He stepped back, and his blood thrilled to the finger-tips.

"Hush—hush!" whispered somebody, or something.

"Who is it? Who are you?" said the schoolmaster.

"Why, don't you know me, Master Burleigh?"

"Jerusha Jane Pope, I'm sure, though I can't see you.

"Are you ready, sir?"

"Wait a moment. I must put up the old mare and make her comfortable, before I go to the house."

"Leave her to me, sir, and I'll put her up."

"No, no, my dear, I want some talk with you before I show myself—ah! what are you doing there?"

"Unbacking the girths, and"—suits the action to the word—"taking off the saddle."

"Pshaw?"

"Let me have my own way, if you please. Don't be silly. You can't see in the dark, and I can."

"See in the dark?"

"Yes—about as well as others do in the daytime, or in twilight."

"Are you beside yourself, Jerusha?"

"Not a bit of it. Ask gran'mother, and she'll satisfy you that once I could not only see in the dark, but through bandages, though I've lost *that* faculty, within the last year."

"Pooh, pooh!"

"True as you're alive, Master Burleigh; and they said I was bewitched; but I am no more bewitched than you are. And my notion is that it has something to do with my health—my bodily health, I mean. But, never mind now. There! you can see what I can do in the dark. I'm no stranger here."

"Why, the headstall is off, and the halter is on, I declare!" said the schoolmaster, feeling about the head of the horse.

"And the saddle off, and hang up, and a good warm blanket over the beast; and now, if you'll wait long enough for me to shake down a mouthful of hay into the rack, and put some wet Indian meal into the crib, I shall be at your service."

"With pleasure."

Not five minutes had passed, when she stood again at his elbow, half giggling and half sobbing.

"And now, if you please, what are your commands Master Burleigh?"

"Commands, child! I've no commands for you; but I should like to know what has happened? And why you sent for me? And what you mean by an awful mystery?"

"Master Burleigh," she said, with a startling change of voice, "I want you to see for yourself—to see with your own eyes—to hear with your own ears, and the awful mystery will explain itself. You are deceived; we are all deceived; some one is possessed; and if you don't see poor Lucy Day, and come to an explanation with her, before you are much older, I—I"—sobbing—"I don't believe she'll be above ground three months."

"What do you mean, child?"

"I mean just what I say. She took to her bed the very morning after you went off; and she never left it, till aunt Sarah made her get up last evening to see an old sweetheart of hers, who, they do say, run off with her once, from a boarding-school in Quebec."

Burleigh stood, as if thunderstruck. All the blood in his body rushed back to his heart, and he staggered as if ready to drop.

"And did she see him, Jerusha?" said he at last, with a convulsive effort, as if choking.

"Yes, but most unwillingly, I'm sure; and then she went back to her bed."

"And where is he now?"

"At the house, occupying your chamber. And now, what say you? Would you like to see Lucy or grandmother?"

"No, not until I have had time to think over the whole business, and make up my mind how to proceed."

"Very well. When you are ready, come in by the back door and go straight up to the north chamber. I'll have it ready for you. Good-night, dear master, good-night!"

She was gone. And there he stood for several minutes, after her footsteps had all died away, wondering and musing. "Dear master!"—when did that child ever call him dear master before? "Child—child!" he continued, talking to himself, "not so much of a child though, after all. Much more of a woman, though a little woman I should say, than a child. She must be—let me see:—why, bless my heart—she is over sixteen—sixteen years of age, as I'm alive; and what a little romp it is, to be sure!"

Profiting by her suggestions, he stole into the house by the back door, and was on his way through the dark entry, when something touched his elbow, and whispered "Hush! not a word for your life. They're together now, and I want you to see them together before you show yourself. Go to your room; you'll find every thing there. And when you hear a tap on the outside window, go down quietly and meet them face to face. I want you to be satisfied."

"One word before you go:—where's Black Prince?"

"In the stall nearest the door."

"Why didn't you send him, instead of the mare?"

"I was not sure of finding you; and you might want him, if you should happen to call this way."

"And my valise, and great-coat; and the little horn-lantern and tinder-box?"

"All on the light stand, or in the chair, by the side of your bed."

"Thank you, my dear child; how thoughtful you have been, to be sure!"

"Ah! see there! the moon is up and you will not need your lantern."

"But I never go without my lantern, child, unless I am in company. I can not see as well in the dark as you do; and having to put up my Black stallion wherever I may happen to be, in strange barns, I must have a lantern, or disturb the family."

Saying this, they parted; and he entered his room with a noiseless tread. Striking a light, he opened the valise, and rearranged it, and was just folding up his great-coat, when he heard a tap on the window. Looking up he saw a small hand resting on the outside of the sash. At first he was startled; but, on going to the window, and seeing a ladder there and somebody on the way down, the mystery was explained.

Taking the valise and great-coat, he went softly down the back stairs. Then unslipping his gun he set it up just inside of the porch, and was on his way to the kitchen, when he heard the sound of whispering and sobbing. His hand was upon the latch-string—it flew up—the door opened a little way, a few inches only, and he was just on the point of speaking, when he saw standing up and nearly facing him, with folded arms and flashing eyes, Edward Frazier, and, at his feet, clinging to his knees, with her black hair loose and streaming over her shoulders, and her eyes lifted to his in an agony of supplication, Lucy Day.

"Oh, mercy! mercy! Edward!" she cried, in a low, half-suffocated voice. "For the love of heaven set me free! You know I can never be your wife; I would rather die!"

"Die then?" he muttered, with a savage scowl, shaking himself loose, and lifting his foot as if to spurn her where she lay, with her forehead touching the hearth, and her arms outstretched in supplication.

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed the schoolmaster, springing forward, like a young panther, and clatching at his throat. "Scoundrel! not for your life!"

But his adversary, a muscular man, familiar with sparring, was too quick for him, and met him with a blow on the forehead which sent him staggering to the farther side of the room. But he recovered himself immediately, and renewed the attempt. Catching Frazier by the collar, by stepping to the right and receiving a left-handed blow on his left arm, he gave his antagonist a twitch and a trip, at the same time, which sent him headlong through the door of the pantry.

Lucy came to herself, and rushing between them, uttered a loud scream. Instantly she was answered by screams from every part of the house—from the best room, from the dark entry, from the cellar and garret, as if all Bedlam had broke loose.

Ned Frazier, on recovering, drew his knife; Barleigh drew his, and stood still, watching every motion with eyes like burning coals, waiting for the attack.

The door opened, and in rushed a little creature, with garments all half flying loose, and wild with horror, followed by Miss Smith in her night-dress.

"For shame! You a minister of the gospel!" screamed Jerusha.

"And you, murderer!" exclaimed Lucy, throwing herself before Ned Frazier. "Touch him for your life!"

"Leave us, oh leave us! I pray you, Master Burleigh?" said Jerusha; and then, seeing him hesitate, she added: "grand mother and I will see to poor Lucy," who tottered into a chair, and covered her face with her hands and sat rocking to and fro, and sobbing as if her very heart would break.

Burleigh disappeared, followed by Frazier; and when poor Lucy looked up in the dead stillness that followed, she saw Jerusha upon her knees before Aunt Sarah, who sat staring at her as if stupefied with amazement.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CATASTROPHE.

ON the morrow Burleigh's black stallion was missing, and with him all his accoutrements, which had been washed, and were still somewhat military; enough to provoke a smile, when the preacher and schoolmaster rode into a Methodist camp, where he was a stranger.

The hunt was continued for nearly two weeks with astonishing success, till the party found themselves on the Labrador trail; but nothing more was heard of Burleigh, and nothing of Frazier. The camp has been removed, by easy stages, to the very borders of Canada; the hunters were beginning to get their traps together and prepare for a return to their first camping-ground, when, just after nightfall, some of the party heard voices along a branch of the Malawaska. Listening awhile, and getting nearer, the noise of altercation was heard, followed by two shots in quick succession, and after a short pause by a third, wholly unlike the first, and ending the sharp crack of a rifle.

"A hunting party from t'other side of the line," said the Brigadier. "And if so, we'd better keep out of the way, till we know more about 'em. How I do wish my Burleigh was here now! I wonder what on earth has become of him?"

"Does he ride the black stallion now?" said Jerusha, who had got tired of resting in camp.

"He never does nothing else, if he can help it," said Father.

"Well, then, I saw a fellow-day before yesterday on a very black horse, tramping through the woods, so far away from home, as if he didn't belong in these parts, and I don't know what he was doing, and he reminded me of the schoolmaster, when I used to climb the bushes with a jump, and cross over that pool we passed, and swim over to the other side, as if he had something more than a moose in sight."

"Oh, it couldn't be Iry. He would lyne us, you may depend."

said the Brigadier. "And, besides, the black stallion was left in our barn, for Iry well knows the worth o' the critter, and he left him there for rest; for he'd a terrible time a gettin' there, when he come down to be married. I never see'd Black Prince so down in the mouth before, did you, Luther?"

"No, father; for the first three or four days; but he soon got up agin, and the night of the rumpus, he broke both halters, and would have got away, and gone off, nobody knows where, but for Jerusha Jane."

"Possible! But what are we to do? Shall we go over there, and try to find out what the matter is, or—"

"Ah! if brother Ned was here now, we'd soon settle their lash," said Bob Frazier. "He knows all the Canada Indians, and was elected a sort of chief by the Ottawas."

"Wal, then, let us go back to camp," continued the Brigadier. "I do wonder what the plague has become o' that feller." And so they took their way, silently and slowly along the edge of the great wilderness, within which, and at no great distance, they had heard the voices in altercation.

It was growing darker and darker, and, as they strung out in Indian file, each carefully stepping in the track of his leader, and all in perfect stillness, they were like a procession of shadows over the snow.

"Ah, what's that?" said the Brigadier, stopping short and making a sign for the others to listen; "don't you hear any thing?"

"I do," said Luther. "What is it, dad?" creeping up to the side of his father, and listening with his hand to his ear.

"It is the howling of a dog," said his father; "but a long way off."

"I do hear something now, sir," said Bob Frazier.

"Maybe it's a wolf," added Joe.

The Brigadier shook his head, with a mournful expression they never forgot. "No, no, my lads, that's no wolf; there's no yelp in it—nothin' of the sharp, snappin' bark of the wolf. To me it sounds like a sort of a— as if something had happened—or was a goin' to happen."

"Maybe it's a warnin', father?"

"Maybe it is, Luther; and, if so, we'd better be prepared for it. There's no knowin' where trouble'll come next; but, if any thing should happen to me, Luther, for, hein the oldest, I'm probably nearest the end o' my journey. I want you should promise me one thing."

"Don't, father, don't!" said Luther, almost shivering. "I do wish you wouldn't talk so."

"Promise me, Luther—give me your solemn promise, and tell your mother what I say, and I call the rest of you to witness—promise me to offer the farm to the Blaisdell heirs at just what I paid for it, they payin' for the betterments and all—win'

interest, and you may leave it out to three men to say how much the airnin' has ben, and settle accordingly."

"Yes, father."

"You understand me now, do you, all of you?"

All answered in the affirmative, wondering what would come next, and what "on airth the old man was a drivin at," as Smith said.

"Very well; that's enough. My accounts are now made up, and I am ready for the wust. Heave ahead!"

They returned to the camp in silence, and, after eating a hearty supper of moose-meat, which your tried hunter picks to the best venison or beef, turned in. But the Brigadier couldn't sleep. After tumbling and tossing about till past midnight, he got up, and, replenishing the fire, sat down by it, and fell into a reverie, from which he was startled by a strange, mournful, very distant sound, which came and went with the night-wind at long intervals.

Taking his gun on his arm, he started off in the direction of the sound, guided by the starlight over the hollows and shadows of the way, for the whole heavens were astir with the glory of the northern lights, and, but for the steady luster of the stars, he would have been sadly bewildered at times. All at once, it seemed to him that it was the howl of a dog—the very sound that so troubled him the night before, but nearer—much nearer—only a mile or two away from the spot where he had first heard it.

Meanwhile, Watch, having nearly gnawed off the rope he was tied with, began to show symptoms of weariness and impatience, until he woke Luther, who, looking about and not seeing his father, listened, and got up, and then went to a spot from whence he could sweep the whole of the vast clearing where they had encamped.

This was too much for the faithful dog. He began a furious barking, so that Luther was obliged to return and untie what there was of the rope. Then they both set off afresh in pursuit of the Brigadier.

"Zemls!" muttered Joe, rubbing his eyes and looking about, as if bewildered, "that confounded dog's enough to drive a fella crazy; haven't slept a wink all night. Hation, what's to pay now, I wonder? Old Methuselah missing, and now his boy and old Watch setting off on a hunt by themselves. I say Bob?"

"Well, Joe, what's in the wind now?"

Joe explained matters, and proposed following Luther.

As they were setting off, they heard that same low, dismal howl. It seemed nearer now. Then a loud, furious barking. They quickened their pace, but were only able, with the greatest exertion, to keep Luther and the dog in sight. Old Watch led the way. The dog grew more and more unreasonable and

Impatient, now returning upon his track to hurry up the lag-gards, now starting off into the woods by himself, more as if he saw something, than if he was following the sound, till at last, out of all patience, he stopped, listened, set up a prolonged bark, ending in a low, melancholy howl. Then he started in the direction of a voice, which seemed to be shouting "*He!p! he!p!*" Then there was a shot, just inside of the nearest thicket. Luther dashed toward it, crying: "*Here, sir, here! This way, boys! this way, Watch!*"

The Fraziers hurried along, all out of breath, and arrived but a few moments after Luther. The first thing they saw was the old man upon his knees by the side of a dead body, Luther standing near it speechless and horror-struck, and a strange dog sitting on his haunches with his nose in the air, and howling over the body, which lay flat upon the face and outstretched at full length on the snow.

At the first glance the two brothers appeared to be filled with amazement and consternation. One look—only one—they interchanged, without speaking, and the next moment they were kneeling by the side of the Brigadier. The body was cold and stiff. On turning it over, so that they could see the face, if they had any doubt before, there was no longer any room for doubt now.

"Oh, brother! brother!" sobbed Joe, while Bob, with a dark, threatening eye, and without allowing a sound to escape him, began searching for the wound, which had stained the shirt-bosom and vest. He was not long in finding it; a few drops of blood—a very few—told the story. The bullet was from a rifle. It had been truly aimed, and lodged in the poor fellow's heart.

While the others were in consultation, the Brigadier began looking about for evidence. There were footmarks of a heavy, thick shoe, corresponding with that which the deceased had on, and which had been lately tapped. Appearances were strong in one spot of a sharp struggle, the crust being broken through in several places, and small twigs and leaves trampled into the snow. Watch was very active running in and out among the bushes, and sniffing the tracks; but the other poor dog, now for the first time recognized as belonging to Ned Frazier, sat still by the side of his master, refusing to be comforted, still as death, and motionless, except when he would utter an impatient yell, or throw up his head with a long, low, plaintive, melancholy whine.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Brigadier, while examining the footprints, "this way, boys, this way! What d'ye call that?" pointing to a clear, well-defined footprint, which could not well be mistaken. All the others seemed to have been carefully obliterated, or covered up and smoothed over in a hurry.

The two brothers looked at the footprint, and then at the Brigadier.

"Jest what I expected!" said he; "that print of the Indian moccasin tells the story. I'm satisfied now; let us be gone."

The brothers assented. The body was borne off to the camp, the camp broken up, the hunt abandoned—forever by the Brigadier—and the whole party went off to their homes, the two brothers vowing that they would find out the murderer, if he was above ground, and bring him to justice, though they should have to follow him to the ends of the earth.

"Right, boys; the avenger of blood will be with you. He **can** not escape," said the Brigadier. "God will not be trifled with. What do you propose to do with the body?"

"Take it home with us, if you will lend us your double sleigh and a pair of horses," said Bob Frazier.

"To be sure I will; have 'em now?"

"If you please."

"Father, get every thing ready for 'em, will you, and then we'll strike for home."

"Agreed."

Within the next half-hour they parted, the Brigadier full of mysterious forebodings, and the two brothers eager and impatient for the work before them.

Until the Brigadier reached his home, and was told what had happened there, he had taken it for granted that the death had occurred in a personal altercation with some of the Canada Indians. The voices they heard, the two shots in quick succession, followed by a third, with the crack of a rifle, were enough to justify the supposition. But after a while, when he found that a devil's feud had sprung up between Barleigh and Edward Frazier, at their last interview—that both had disappeared, and not been heard of since the night of the quarrel, he began to have other and most uncomfortable apprehensions. Still he kept his own counsel, waiting to hear from the two brothers, and pursuing his inquiries in a way of his own. At last he heard of the black stallion, with a rider supposed to be Barleigh, though nobody had spoken with him or seen his face from two or three different quarters a hundred miles apart. Next he ascertained that Barleigh had left his shot gun at a neighbor's, ten or twelve miles out of the way, and that a rifle, which he had kept in the hay-mow, was missing about the same time. The good old man felt sore. Should he pursue the inquiry further?

A reward was offered, but nothing came of it. Soon after this, a circumstance which he had wholly forgotten was brought to his remembrance by the merest accident. On finding a pair of thick boots in Barleigh's chamber, and making some inquiries below, he found that, when he left the house, after the quarrel with Frazier, the schoolmaster wore moccasins, and Luther remembered that he had worn moccasins all the time they were together on the hunt.

The old man shook with terror. The dreadful suspicion began to wear an alarmingly definite shape. As a magistrate, he had a duty to perform, and though he had no jurisdiction where the homicide happened, still his duty was clear. Not that he believed Ira Burleigh a murderer; but a manslayer he must be, under some great provocation, such as that which roused him to draw a knife on Frazier, after receiving a blow.

Month after month passed, yet nothing was heard of Burleigh. Most unaccountable and mysterious, everybody said, but nobody dreamed of connecting the death of the young stranger with his disappearance. The poor old man had to carry the dread secret in his heart until it was like fire shut up in his bones. At last, as "murder will out," nobody knows how, the whole country was found astir and ringing with the strange stories about Burleigh. All the facts were distorted—all the circumstances exaggerated. As he no longer appeared among the brethren, they began to be uneasy about him, and after due inquiry, having understood that *the spirits* had charged him with the murder, they went over to have a talk with Uncle Jeremiah. Then followed a committee of the Quakers; then a law bill, offering a large reward for the apprehension of Ira Burleigh, charged with the murder of Edward Frazier, and giving a minute description of his person, appearance and garb, and of the black stallion, which was soon after heard of in Vermont, where he had been sold by a stranger, whose appearance and age corresponded with the description of the hand-bill. The horse was sold *about a week after the supposed murder!*

One of the first things that Uncle Jeremiah did was to get possession of the affidavits and testimony in relation to the Blissell house and the spirits. The following brief extract from that of Mary Gordon, will give an idea of the others, amounting, perhaps, to fifty or a hundred:

TESTIMONY.

"On the 4th of August, 1830, about two hours before daylight, while I slept in Mr. Blissell's house, I was waked by the noise of knocking. I got up, and with about twenty others went into the cellar. There I heard such a voice speaking to us, as I never heard before nor since. It was shrill, but very mild and pleasant. At first the apparition was a mere mass of light; then grew into personal form, about as tall as myself. We stood in two ranks, about four or five feet apart. Between these ranks she slowly passed and repassed, so that any of us could have handled her. When she passed by me her nearness was that of contact; so that if there had been a substance, I should have certainly felt it. The glow of the apparition had a constant tremulous motion. At last the personal form became shapeless, expanded every way, and then vanished in a moment."—p. 51

Having satisfied himself upon two points—first, that all the testimony had been given by respectable persons, in good faith; and, secondly, that the reports in circulation about the spirits having charged Burleigh with the murder, were wholly groundless, he lost no time in offering the farm to the Blaisell heirs. But, so profoundly impressed were they, and all others interested in the inheritance, by a belief that the old house was haunted, and the spirits still busy there, that nobody would meddle with it, nor with the farm apart from the house.

Meanwhile the Brigadier was comforted with the assurance of aunt Sarah and poor Lucy Day, that they did not believe in the guilt of Burleigh, even though it should turn out that he had been the death of Frazier, after what had happened at their last interview, he with such astonishing self-command, while Frazier was hot, hasty and imperious. "If he killed him, therefore, which I do not believe," said Lucy, with trembling lips and locked hands, "I am sure it was in self-defense, and so it will turn out; for I know Master Burleigh, and I know what he is capable of better than you, grandfather, or anybody else."

"And you think as well of him now as ever you did, hey?" said aunt Sarah.

"Better, by far; I would lay down my life for him."

"Wal, wal; patience, patience; and if he is innocent, God will clear him."

Nearly six months after the death of Frazier had passed. The stories had all died away, and the very handbills had been well-nigh forgotten. Nothing to the purpose had been heard from Burleigh, and very little from the Fraziers, except that some of the Ottawas shook their heads mysteriously, when the subject was mentioned, and seemed to know more than they chose to tell, and that the Canada Indians hardly ever used rifles. There happened to be a "clam-bake" at a beautiful place called the New Meadows, near what is now the city of Bath.

Pits were dug along the shore, and filled with large, round boulders, or what are called "rocks" in New England. Upon these boulders, huge heaps of wood and brush had been burning for several hours, so that each contained a wheelbarrow load of ashes and live coals. These were piled, tier above tier, with layers of sea-weed between, with bushels and bushels of clams, lobsters by the score, eggs by the basket, and green corn by the acre. At a little distance, nearer the shore and just over the bank, a floor of rough boards was laid for dancing; a platform built for the musicians and speakers, and tables of the same rude material, running off under the trees, away and afar, like preparations for Independence-day.

At last, when every thing was ready, and the bowls and plates were distributed, and the gaping clams were beginning

to be fished out of the sea-weed, and the young people were running off into by-places with the roasted eggs, smoking lobsters, and hot-corn, there was a sudden outcry from the nearest wood—a general shouting and scampering, with cries: "That's him! that's him! There he goes! there he goes!"

Looking up, the Brigadier, who occupied the seat of honor, saw something which made him spring to his feet and gasp for breath, while he stood pointing with outstretched arm toward a stranger standing out in full sight, just on the edge of the nearest wood, with a flapped hat, long hair, and a scan reszag over the hollow of his left arm, while his right hand seemed to be touching the trigger.

"After him, boys! Bring him in, dead or alive!" shouted the Brigadier.

But nobody moved. They were content with calling to one another to "stop thief! stop thief!" "head him off! head him off!"

But the stranger stood still, and never moved nor spoke till he saw the Brigadier coming toward him, when, instead of turning to flee as they expected, he met him half-way, and was about offering his hand when he seemed to recollect himself, and stopped, saying, with a hollow voice, "No, sir, no! never will I shake hands with you, nor shall you touch mine, till you have acknowledged my innocence, though I should have to swing for it."

He was haggard and pale, and his clothes hung about him in tatters, and so loose that he seemed to have wasted away to a skeleton.

"Iry Barleigh," said the good old man, almost choking, "I'm sorry to see you. What has brought you here?"

"Sorry to see me!—*you*! After branding me for a murderer, and setting a price on my head? *You*, that knew me so well, Uncle Jeremiah!"

"What else could I do? Appearances were all against you, and I am a justice of the peace."

"True, and I have come to give myself up to you, my old friend, because you are a justice of the peace—a magistrate, and because I find your name to this printed paper, which I saw, for the first time, two weeks ago, more than three hundred miles from here, and because"—with a little bitterness—"because you were my father's friend. Bear witness for me, neighbors and brethren"—looking about and addressing the multitude in a clear, ringing voice, such as they had heard him utter with at camp-meeting—"Bear witness for me, that I am not overpowered nor hunted—that I make no resistance," handing his gun to the Brigadier, who exclaimed "a rife, by George!" and then his hunting-knife, and holding out his hands to be tied. "Now, all I ask of you is to secure me, and to remember all this, that your faith may fall not, when we come to trial. Ah!"

"Oh, sir, sir! Oh, Master Burleigh!" screamed a young woman, bursting through the crowd and throwing herself upon his neck; "I, at least, never doubted you! My faith never failed!"

Burleigh looked at her for a moment, and was well-nigh overcome. He raised his eyes to heaven, lifted up his hands for a moment, murmured a few brief words, and pressed his pale lips to her forehead.

"Oh, Lucy! Lucy! God forgive us both!" he said.

"And here is another," said Lucy, looking up into his face with swimming eyes, and lips trembling with joy, and lifting to her feet a young girl who had been kneeling on the grass, with her hands covering her face, and sobbing as if her heart would break. "Here is another, who never doubted you—never for a moment; whose faith in you never failed."

"And you, too, Jerusha! Dear child; you too are faithful among the faithless—you would not forsake your old master, would you?"

"Never! Though all the world forsake thee, yet would I not forsake thee," she murmured.

"Beware! We must not promise too much. Remember Peter. But enough; be comforted. I am innocent, wholly innocent of this great transgression. Be comforted therefore, even though I should fail to make my innocence appear; and believe me, when I tell you that, as I hope for mercy hereafter," uncovering his head, and looking up with a blaze of holy trust and triumph in his wonderful eyes, "as I hope for mercy hereafter, that I have had no part nor lot in the death of Edward Frazier!"

"I *do* believe you! I do! *I do!*—and so do I! and I! and I!" said many, that stood near him, with voices full of sincerity.

"Great God, I thank thee! Now take me to the jail, and have me examined at the earliest possible hour. I have no time to lose—and must be about my Father's business!"

Straightway the gathering dispersed. The people went home to tell the news and to set the whole country wondering how.

No time was lost. The examination was held before Uncle Jeremiah, and, upon proof of the quarrel, of the bag and moccasins; the change of a shotgun for a rifle, and the sale of his horse, etc., etc., he was fully convinced. He offered no explanation, urged not a syllable in his own defence, made no objection when he was ordered to the nearest jail, there to wait for the coming together of the grand jury in the county where the offense happened. He even refused the help of counsel, two or three of whom volunteered from among the people.

"No, never!" said he, "never, never! I shall put my trust in the God of my fathers. He knows my innocence, and he will not suffer me to perish, unless I deserve it. He will never leave me nor forsake me. Don't be downhearted, my old friend," he

continued, throwing his arms over the neck of the Brigadier. "You have done your duty, like a man and a Christian; I honor you for it. I thank you all for your kindness and the witnesses for telling the simple truth—and the whole truth"—laying his hand caressingly upon Lucy's arm and looking at aunt Sarah—both of whom had been obliged to testify, and they had done so freely and without qualification, as if they had been called before the judgment-seat of God, though bitter tears ran down their cheeks all the time and they trembled from head to foot and were obliged to sit down before they had got through.

"When the day of trial comes, I hope to be prepared. I do not fear death, my friends, nor do I desire death," he added, with unspeakable tenderness and solemnity, "but I will never consent to bring a reproach upon the cause of my beloved Master, if I can help it."

"Oh Lord! forsake me not when my strength faileth!" exclaimed the patriarch, clutching at the back of a chair. "Oh, give me not up, now that I am old and gray, like thy servant David!"

The schoolmaster continued looking round upon the people who crowded the room, the entry, the doorway, all the open windows, and the green level in front of the house, with open mouths and eager looks. "I have been very weary of life, but I am so no longer"—looking down upon poor Lucy, who had stolen up to his side and thrown her arms about his neck and buried her face in his bosom.

"God bless you, dearest! No, not weary of life now. I have endangered it many times foolishly, wantonly, wickedly; but within the last hour it has become so dear to me that I shall not willingly part with it"—laying his hand reverently on the girl's head, and smoothing her beautiful hair. "And now," he added, after a short pause, looking into her eyes with a holy tenderness, and quietly disengaging her arms, while he set his lips to her forehead, "now, dearest, farewell!"

"Oh, no, no, no!" screamed the half-distracted girl, "he is innocent! We all know he is innocent!"

"Lucy dear, it must be so," offering his arms to be pinioned by the elbows. "Be comforted, I pray you." Then, still more impressively, he added, in a voice hardly loud enough to be heard by the nearest of the bystanders, though it filled the room, and seemed to be understood by the people outside. "You all looked up and then bowed their heads in reply: 'Ye believe in God, believe also in me!'"

"We do believe in thee, Iry Barleigh," said the Brigadier, shutting his eyes, and bowing his uncovered head and streaming hair in the direction of the nearest window.

Having pinioned his arms, and tied his legs, at his own request, for he asked no favors of mortal man, he said, and chose

to be treated as others were, under accusation, he was lifted into a wagon by two deputy sheriffs, and carted off, amid the cries and groans and sobbing of the women and children, and the half-threatening gestures and fierce looks of the men, to the nearest jail—a wretched affair, built of logs on the foundation of what had once been a block-house, when the Norridgewocks were in their glory.

He might have escaped with ease; for the cell he was confined in was all above ground, with a chimney, out of which the blue clay had fallen, and there were places he could see through. He called the attention of the jailer to the circumstance, and counseled an immediate change for the latter; “not that he had any idea of escaping, for he had just given himself up,” he said; “but if he should happen to change his mind—and, under certain circumstances, people do change sometimes, you know—it would be better for you, my good friend, that you should not be suspected of negligence, nor of favoring my escape.” The jailer thanked him, and the holes were stopped, the walls strengthened, and a large flat stone placed over the chimney before he slept.

Week after week, month after month, wore away, till the judges, before whom he was to be tried, found their way into the neighborhood of Wiscasset, and he was notified that on the following Tuesday, if the grand jury found a bill against him, he would be arraigned. Still he would have no lawyer—no counsel. He would not even consent to plead to the want of jurisdiction, though assured by Prentiss Mellen, of Portland, afterward Chief Justice, that the plea would be sustained.

“And what then?” said he, with a sorrowful smile; “where would be my character? Where the vindication of a righteous law? No, no! If I perish, I perish.”

The morning came. “But where are your witnesses?” said the high sheriff.

“God knows! I am not called upon to prove my innocence, Mr. Sheriff, am I? The witnesses for the Government will answer my purpose. All I want is the truth, and the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

“But you may have to show something—an *alibi* perhaps,” suggested the sheriff.

“An *alibi*? Very true. *I had forgotten that!* Stop a moment. Allow me to think. How much time shall I have, should the grand jury bring in a bill?”

“As much time as may be needed, I dare say; but I wish you had thought of all this before.”

“So do I; but let us hope for the best. My witnesses are in Quebec.”

“In Quebec! Then it’s all up with you.”

“How so?”

“We can not oblige them to testify here.”

"You can not? Well, I can. Give me a bit of paper, and if you will be ready to send for them, as soon as the question is settled by the grand jury, here is the order which will bring them."

"Yes; but you may not know, Master Burleigh, that you must pay your own witnesses, and get them here at your own charge."

"Indeed!—well, you can see to that for me"—offering the sheriff a handful of bright new guineas.

"As a friend, yes, but not as an officer, for I have no authority after we cross the line."

"Of course; good-morning!"

"Good-morning, and God send you a good deliverance."

The very next day, the grand jury found a true bill; he was arraigned, pleaded "not guilty," was offered a list of the panel, which he tore into small pieces and threw out of the nearest window, without reading the names.

The judges looked at him with surprise, and then fell a-whispering together, as if they saw in the act a preparation for the plea of insanity.

"Are you ready for your trial?" said the judge.

"No, sir, but shall be ready in a week, at furthest."

"Have you any counsel?"

"No, thanks be to God!"

The judges again eyed him with astonishment, and then asked if they should assign counsel?

"No," he said, with great calmness and dignity. "If my innocence can not be made to appear without counsel, I am ready to die."

"This is very strange, brother," said Chief Justice Parsons, to the nearest of his associates. "Prisoner at the bar, have you any witnesses?"

"No, may it please the court; but I hope to have at least one, besides the Government witnesses."

"Let the case be set down for trial next Tuesday," said the Chief Justice. "Call the next case. Mr. Attorney, I did not ask if you would be ready—for you are always ready, sir."

The prosecutor bowed, with a look of gratification.

Late in the evening of the following Sabbath, after several of his friends had been to see and take their leave of him, and expressing their belief in his innocence, and most of them their settled conviction that no jury would ever find him guilty upon such evidence as they believed to exist, the heavy door opened and a stranger entered the cell, in the garb of a Catholic priest.

"Father Francis! Can it be possible?" exclaimed Burleigh, the tears filling his eyes, as he caught the priest by both his hands. "The very man I most wanted to see! I thought: you

had left the country. Now let them do their worst! Should every thing else fail, your testimony can save me."

Father Francis bowed, and made the sign of the cross.

"You can show *where* I was, and how I was employed, at the very time of the alleged murder."

"Certainly; but vy you not sent for me, eh?"

"As I told you before, I thought you had left the country; but I did send for father Joseph, and I expect him here to-night. He will show *where* I got the handbill, and how I started off as soon as I was well enough to sell my horse, with the declared intention of giving myself up."

At this moment, there was a slight tapping at the door.

"Come in," said the prisoner.

The door opened slowly, inch by inch; then there was a loud, joyful scream, and Lucy Day rushed in, followed by Jerusha, and threw herself upon her knees before the stranger.

He started, took both of her hands into his, lifted her up, and shook his head at her, and smiled.

"Ha! *ma pauvre petite*—my poor pet lamb! Have I find you at last!—you leetel runaway?"

"And so you are acquainted with Father Francis, I see," said Lucy, to the schoolmaster, with a puzzled look.

"Yes, and I know all about your elopement as they called it! Nay, nay, don't blush, I pray you."

"She have elope, not *viz*, but *teizout* her lover, to get de barrass of him, what you call git rid. How you find zat, ley?"

"And all this you know, Master Burleigh?" said she, in a faint voice.

"Yes, dear, and I know where you stayed, and the good sisters that received you, while that unhappy young man was after you in full cry, till you got safely under the wing of your old grandfather."

"Thank God! thank God! Now am I in feel happy?" said she, falling upon her knees, and covering her face with her hands, while Jerusha Jane sobbed and smiled, got up and sat down, and cried and laughed till the jailers who threatened to pack her off to Bedlam.

The trial came on. The witnesses for the prosecution were all through; there was a deathlike silence in court; the prisoner stood up, looking very pale, but calm, serene and self-possessed, and seemed about addressing the court, when there was a bustle at the door, and, after a few moments, Father Francis appeared, looking a white-haired, stooping old man, and blind with age. Leaving him in the witness-box, he went first up to Burleigh and whispered something which instantly changed the color of his face to a deathlike, livid hue—he bowed by a flush of triumph and joy; and then up to the bench, where he seemed to be communicating what they were wholly unprepared for. The judges held a consultation, and, after

looking at the prisoner, who stood that moment with his head thrown back and eyes closed, there came up a low sound of murmured prayer, in which they could only distinguish the words: "Almighty God! I thank thee!" They called up the State attorney. He seemed still more astonished; and, after talking a few minutes with Father Francis, to whom the oath, upon a Catholic Bible, had been administered, he turned toward the bench, and, with evident pleasure and great emotion, offered to enter a *not pro*, upon the ground that another was guilty of the murder of Edward Frazier, if murder there was, and not the prisoner at the bar."

"Let us have the evidence all out in open court, before we decide, Mr. Attorney," said the Chief Justice.

A general murmur, with a great elbowing and crowding followed. The venerable stranger having taken the stand, with a solemnity that moved the people to tears and seemed greatly to disturb the spectacles of the Chief Justice, who began taking snuff by the handkerchief, and spilling it all over his waistcoat, so as to make a broad yellow path of rappee from the flaps up to the port of discharge, testified that about a week after the death of the deceased he had been sent for to visit a dying man. He went a long distance, and there found a Penobscot Indian, who was wounded in two places with buck shot and bullets. The Indian said that a white hunter, named Frazier, had sprung his moose trap and stolen his dead game; that he had followed him day after day till he found him hunting moose with some Ottawas on the borders of the Aroostook; that he accused Frazier of the theft, which he acknowledged, saying if he was fool enough to leave dead game hanging on the trees where hungry men were always passing, he must expect it to be stolen, and it was good enough for him. The Penobscot then charged him with cutting the rope and springing the moose trap. Frazier only laughed, and told him to go about his business, and finally clubbed him and struck him, and threatened him with a dose from his double barreled gun. The Penobscot carried a rifle—here Burleigh remembered a look with the Bagpiper—wanting to get under cover, he retreated with his rifle toward Frazier's camp, and pointed in that direction. Before he reached the bushes Frazier fired both barrels, and the Penobscot was hit in two places. When seen, having recovered from the shock he drew trigger and shot his antagonist dead, and then went after the Ottawas to tell them what he had done; but he grew so weak from loss of blood that he had to lie down several times, and, at last, to crawl on his hands and knees to the nearest lodge, where he lay helpless and alone till he was found by some white hunters and carried to a place of safety. The Penobscot died three days after this confession—he was dying at the time, and witness, who had some acquaintance with surgery, told him so. Witness officiated at his funeral and saw him buried."

A stillness, hushed and solemn as death followed.

"Any more witnesses?" said the Chief Justice.

"One more, if the court please. Let Father Francis be called."

Being put upon the stand, he testified that Barleigh was with him, at Quebec, at the time of the supposed murder; that he had been quite ill for a week, and confined to his bed; that he went away before he had fully recovered his strength, and had a relapse; that he, the witness himself, gave him the first information he appeared to have about the charge against him; that the prisoner said he was ready to meet the charge, and left him, and he saw him no more till they met in the jail."

Another long and solemn pause, a brief consultation, a few whispered words from the prosecutor, and the Chief Justice said: "You may enter a *not pros.*, if you think proper, Mr. Attorney."

"Excuse me," said the prisoner; "I should very much prefer a verdict, if the court please. My character is all I have left now."

Whereupon the Chief Justice charged the jury in a few brief and impressive words, and they returned a verdict of "*not guilty*," without leaving their seats.

Then there was a tumultuous outburst from the crowded court-room which the officers were unable to suppress for a few minutes, followed by hurrahs and shoutings on the outside, running away off to the woods, with a chorus of echoes, dying away in the distance.

Lucy, who had stolen up to the side of the prisoner's box, or dock, put her hand into his without speaking; aunt Sarah and Jerusha and some of the other visitors, and half a score of the Brethren hurried up to shake hands with Barleigh, who seemed just ready to faint, as they stood around, wiping their eyes and sobbing.

"Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!" said the Brigadier, taking off his hat, and lifting his aged eyes to the Father above!

The people separated and the schoolmaster went about his business. The whole affair turned out a nine days' wonder, only to be forgotten, like the clouds that are lifted from the sea by a change of wind.

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